Both Sides of the Curtain: Auckland Music Theatre Inc. 1919 to 2009

with reference to the period from 1841 to 1918

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

The University of Auckland

2013
Abstract

This thesis, based on microhistorical methods, explores how the genre of musical theatre using works of European, British and American origins was introduced into the Auckland region. The oldest surviving theatrical society in the region, Auckland Music Theatre Inc., founded as the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society in 1919, is used as the exemplar. The history of the first ninety years of the society is examined within the cultural and social context of the developing urban environment, and shows how the society adapted to the changing social, economic and aesthetic issues affecting the realm of musical theatre. The interaction between amateur and professional practitioners forms an integral part of the study. Musical theatre is a comparatively recent term, which encompasses a variety of musical and theatrical forms that have evolved over the centuries. Consequently, a study of the period from 1841 to 1918 has been included, showing how the foundations for musical theatre were laid. Many traditions were introduced during that time, and Auckland Music Theatre Inc. does have its genesis in those historical factors. Indeed, the society claims a link with the Auckland Amateur Opera Club that operated from 1883/84 to 1902. To research the historical background, concepts and related issues, literature from a range of fields was used: musical theatre, operetta, opera, microhistory, historiography, social and cultural theory, sociology, anthropology, ethnology, biography and New Zealand history. Archival material from the records of Auckland Music Theatre, private collections and newspapers was supplemented by the interviews of twenty-four practitioners, who have helped to shape both amateur and professional musical theatre in the Auckland region. Musical theatre is deeply entrenched in the Auckland region because of the efforts of amateur societies, currently numbering no fewer than nine. However, amateur practitioners are largely taken for granted and ignored by scholars, despite their significant contribution to the cultural and social life of the Auckland region. Thus, they are the marginalised, “hidden musicians”, and a fitting subject for a microhistory. This study builds on research initiated by John Lowerson who undertook a definitive study of the important contribution of amateur operatic societies to the social and cultural life of Great Britain and other parts of the world, including New Zealand.
Dedication

To my beloved husband Dimitri and my much cherished late parents Julia Pavlovna Jackson and Dr Harry Jackson
Preface

Music has always been an integral part of my life because my highly musical late mother fondly upheld the English, Russian and Scottish theatrical traditions which were part of my heritage. It is from my mother that I inherited my love of classical music, opera, operetta and musical theatre. My father died when I was three years old. As a result my mother and I migrated to New Zealand as World War II refugees in 1950. Music was my Arcadia, and I spent my schooldays in Auckland happily participating in a range of theatrical activities. After I left school it seemed a natural progression to audition for a musical called South Pacific (1965), which was staged by the Auckland Operatic Society.

My decision to join the Auckland Operatic Society has had a far-reaching effect on my life. Musical theatre has been a source of great joy, providing opportunities to develop my artistic skills as well as giving me a sense of belonging to a community with a shared purpose. Happily, many of the friendships I made during South Pacific and subsequent musicals have survived the twin tyrants of time and distance. In common with many of my friends, however, I discovered that a fulltime theatrical career was not financially viable. Consequently, I pursued a lucrative corporate career to subsidise my theatrical activities. My theatrical training proved invaluable in my career with regard to organising events, speaking in public and providing entertainment. I was privileged also to act as minute secretary for the Mercury Theatre Trust Board monthly meetings from 1970 to 1972. During this time, the inspirational Dr John Cowie Reid (1916-72), a founding member of the Mercury Theatre, was an active board member and keen supporter of the arts. Dr Reid was both a well-respected theatre critic, and professor and head of English at the University of Auckland.

After more than four decades of “treading the boards” in both Auckland and Sydney, and viewing musicals in many parts of the world, including the West End and Broadway, I felt a growing desire to investigate the history of amateur musical theatre groups that form an integral part of the cultural life of Auckland. And it seemed fitting to use the Auckland Operatic Society, now known as Auckland Music Theatre Inc., as the exemplar. Pleasingly, many of my long-standing friends and acquaintances, who have been instrumental in shaping the history of musical theatre in Auckland, were willing to be interviewed in the course of my research. It is with sadness that I acknowledge the passing into the universe of four interviewees: Garth Clark, Roland Everard, Vivian Jacobs and Doreen Yalland. Their interviews are, indeed, now part of history.

It is some years since I have performed in an Auckland Music Theatre production. Consequently, that has ensured that this microhistory did not become a sentimental excursion into a personal Ruritania. Nevertheless, as I have continued to take a behind-the-scenes and a
front-of-house interest in the society, nowadays I regard myself as a participant/observer as well as an insider.

On my return from Australia, where I lived for eighteen years, I was employed by Opera New Zealand in an administrative capacity from 1997 to 1998. The position included a wide range of duties such as attending opening night functions and organising sponsorship luncheons. I was fortunate to meet many international stars who were imported to sing the leading roles. On one occasion, I acted as interpreter for a singer whose English skills were limited because his native language was Russian. From 1999 to 2007 I was employed as the arts/cultural events coordinator at Rangitoto College, the largest high school in New Zealand, with more than 3,000 students. In this role I acted as production manager for school musicals and arts festivals, approached sponsors for donations, organised performing and technical workshops, and supervised the stage lighting crew. Moreover, I assisted teachers with implementing the Performance Programmes in Music, Dance and Drama, which have been part of the government curriculum for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement since 2002.

Over the past fourteen years, I have been employed also as a singing teacher in my own right. In addition, I write and produce small-scale musicals that feature both my students and semi-professional guest artistes. Moreover, I organise concerts that include a wide range of music from opera and musical theatre to folk music, and from jazz to pop. The venues vary from my home music studio, which seats under forty people, to hired theatres that seat up to 150. Thus, I am a “hidden musician”. This thesis, too, is primarily interested in the activities of other relatively “hidden musicians” rather than traditional music history which focuses on illustrious names on the world stage.
Acknowledgements

I have been grateful for the opportunity to fulfil a long-time ambition to study for a Ph.D., but it would not have been possible without the support of many people.

Special gratitude is expressed to Dr David Lines, who has been my supervisor over the past four years. I have enjoyed our many philosophical discussions and appreciated his guidance, encouragement, extensive knowledge and sense of humour.

I am grateful also to Associate Professor Heath Lees who was my supervisor for the first year of study, and spent many months prior to that assisting me to formulate my research proposal. His warm reception of my topic was most encouraging.

I thank Associate Professor Dean Sutcliffe for his judicious advice on tricky formatting matters and all aspects of my thesis. It is much appreciated.

The staff of the Music and Dance Library at the University of Auckland deserve mention not only for their gracious assistance in locating books and providing advice, but also for the friendly chats. Thank you to Phillippa McKeown-Green, Rolan, Natalie and Alesha.

Gratitude is expressed to the staff at the following libraries: Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington; Auckland War Memorial Museum; Auckland City Library Special Collections; the Takapuna Library; and the University of Auckland General Library.

To the committee of Auckland Music Theatre and the trustees of the Auckland Musical Arts Trust, a special thank you is extended for the delighted response to my proposed course of study, and the moral support. I am grateful that I have had such easy access to the archives.

To John Fausett, Ian Gardiner, Sandra Sewell, Brian White and the late Garth Clark and Vivian Jacobs deep gratitude is expressed for answering some tricky queries, and unearthing photographs and documents.

The following are thanked for their help in various capacities: Robert Alderton, Bill Brinsley, Anthony Carroll, Cerie Devliotis, Doreen and Ken Donnell, Ray Dormer, the late Roland Everard, Derek Firth, Mary Gray, Roger Hall, Val Hemphill, Neil Jenkins, Simon Julius, Margo Knightbridge, Bill Leathwick, Julia Leathwick, Janice Mackay, Louise Malloy, Brian O’Connor, Yvonne Phillips-Everard, Stephen Rowe, Neville and Sherrin Scelly, Vivienne Smith, Susan Story, Joan Thomson, Pauline Vella, Maggie Wright and the late Doreen Yalland.

The moral support from my long-time friend Dr Sandra Bassett has been of great importance on this long journey.

Special thanks on both an academic and personal level is extended to my friends Dr Hans-Peter Stoffel and Gerti Stoffel.

To my school friend Raewyn Kitching, who suggested that we audition for South Pacific back in our salad days, a special thank you is extended.

Finally, to my husband Dimitri, heartfelt thanks is expressed for his patience and practical support over the past five years, including being noble enough to accompany me to a four-day musical theatre conference in New York. A big thank you is due also for the considerable amount of proofreading that he has undertaken.
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Explanatory Notes

• This thesis has been formatted in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style, fifteenth edition, and the University of Auckland Ph.D. thesis guidelines.
• Numbers have been formatted according to the Chicago Manual of Style.
• As recommended in the Chicago Manual of Style, for ease of reference excerpts from newspapers have been inserted in the body of the work rather than in the footnotes. Each individual newspaper reference, consequently, is not listed in the Bibliography. Printed copies of all newspaper extracts used are available on file. The electronic source for all newspaper references from 1841 to 1918 is the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, http://www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast.
• Personal communications are not listed in the Bibliography, as full details are provided in the body of the thesis.
• Shortened forms of book titles are used in the footnotes because full versions are included in the Bibliography. However, for online sources, full details are generally included at the first reference, so that immediate access may be gained if necessary. In the Bibliography, the internet sources have been presented alphabetically according to the first word used in the heading, where an author is not listed.
• For clarity, the use of acronyms has been kept to a minimum.
• Dates of birth (and death) have been included as a matter of historical interest, where relevant.
• The term “British musical” has been used to refer to musicals originating in the United Kingdom as this is the common term utilised in established texts.
• The term “Great Britain” or “Britain” includes England, Scotland, and Wales; the “United Kingdom” includes England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; and “The British Isles” includes England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
• The term “American musical” has been used to refer to musicals originating in the United States of America.
• The term “America” refers to the United States of America as this is the common usage in established texts which focus on musical theatre.
• In charts and tables, the British and American musical will be referred to as originating in the “UK” and “USA” respectively, because those are the terms in common usage.
• Care has been taken to use the terminology of the time throughout the thesis. For the first several decades, the term “Great Britain” rather than “England” was in common usage in New Zealand. At times, the term “Continental European” instead of “European”, has been used in the context of the population of New Zealand, for clarity.
• The term “straight theatre” refers to drama or non-musical theatre, as this was the common term used until recent times. This is done in full awareness of the fact that the term nowadays can have other connotations.
• Images of photographs and programmes have been reduced in size owing to space restrictions. Some images have been cropped or enhanced for ease of viewing.
• The names of performers, administrators and production teams have been left in their original form throughout, to reflect the era. In some cases, more than one member of a family participated in a production. Therefore, the use of the full name prevents confusion.
• The names of the three headquarters of Auckland Music Theatre, the “Hall”, the “Gog” and the “Tin Shed” are capitalised throughout this thesis.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Setting the Scene

Amateur musical theatre societies have made a substantial contribution to the cultural life of the Auckland region by fostering participation in the arts within the community for more than a century. These societies have provided the main performing arts arena for many individuals, together with social, economic and aesthetic benefits.\(^1\) This historic input, nonetheless, has not yet been fully recognised, as is testified by the lack of scholarly studies on the topic. Consequently, I intend to redress the imbalance.

The Auckland region has 1.4 million inhabitants who constitute approximately one-third of the total population of New Zealand, but it lacks a professional musical theatre company.\(^2\) However, owing to the input of amateur societies, musical theatre has a long and active history. At present, the region is home to no fewer than nine societies. Auckland Music Theatre Inc., founded in 1919 as the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society Inc., is the oldest surviving theatrical society in the region, and will be used as the main exemplar. The society has overcome the many challenges created by the changing conditions in its immediate local environment.

This thesis, accordingly, addresses the question: how did Auckland Music Theatre Inc., adapt to changing social, economic and aesthetic issues affecting the realm of musical theatre? As the society celebrated its ninetieth jubilee in 2009, it was fitting to encompass the first ninety years of its operations. The period from 1841 to 1918 is also included in this study because many theatrical traditions were introduced during that time, and Auckland Music Theatre does have its genesis in those historical factors.\(^3\)

I considered that a microhistorical approach was apposite, because microhistorians focus on in-depth investigations of the lives of ordinary people, local communities and

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\(^1\) There are no fewer than seventy-five musical theatre societies throughout the North and South Islands of New Zealand, located in rural areas as well as in suburban and metropolitan centres, in 2009.

\(^2\) The Auckland Theatre Company, a professional group established in 1992, mounts from seven to eight plays per year and occasionally stages musicals. Since colonisation many professional theatre groups have been established in Auckland, but have not survived.

\(^3\) New Zealand became a British colony on 6 February 1840 with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi by Maori and representatives of the Crown. Auckland was declared the capital, prompting an influx of migrants from the British Isles, although a small number of Europeans had settled in the town prior to that time. English became the official language despite the fact that Maori settlement predated British. As cited in Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, 59.
marginalised people, who are usually ignored in favour of grand narratives that centre on famous personages or events. The microhistorian, Carlo Ginzburg, contends that many biographies of ordinary people have revealed that it is possible “to trace, as in a microcosm, the characteristics of an entire social stratum in a specific historical period, whether it be the Austrian nobility or the lower clergy in seventeenth-century England”.

Accordingly, by tracing the history of Auckland Music Theatre and its predecessors, I will show how the shifting patterns of their theatrical activities and changing fortunes reflect a wider social picture.

In her study of amateur music-makers in Milton Keynes, Ruth Finnegan maintains that those practitioners are the “hidden musicians”, because their contribution to society is taken for granted by the general public, and largely ignored by scholars. Likewise, this observation can be applied to amateur societies in Auckland, who are also hidden musicians. Finnegan, who had been an amateur musician for many years before becoming a scholar, cites her own experience as an example. She acknowledges that “for the great majority of people it is the local amateur scene that forms the setting for their active musical experience”. During her academic career, however, she found that it was “easy to underestimate these grass-roots musical activities given the accepted emphasis in academic and political circles on great musical masterpieces, professional music, or famed national achievements”. It was some years before Finnegan realised that the local music-making scene was “an equally interesting subject, linking with many of the traditional scholarly questions about the social contexts and processes of artistic activity and human relationships”. Thus, she acknowledged the significant contribution made to the cultural heritage of the United Kingdom by ordinary people. Equally, this microhistory seeks to exemplify the important contribution made by one amateur musical theatre society to the cultural heritage of the Auckland region and to the changing musical experiences encountered by performers and audiences.

The term “musical theatre” is a comparatively recent one that encompasses a variety of musical and theatrical forms which have evolved over the centuries. It is essential, therefore, to have an understanding of the theatrical landscape of Auckland prior to the advent of musical theatre. As there was not an established cultural milieu in 1841 Auckland, the emerging arts activity had to strive to gain a foothold. Art forms were

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5 Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms, xx.
6 Finnegan, The Hidden Musicians, xi.
7 Ibid., xii.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., xi.
imported into New Zealand from different cultural centres including the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Europe. This was initiated by British migrants. As John Lowerson observes, “it was largely an extension of the national domestic memory, a continuing safeguard against the foreigners among whom one had to live”.\(^\text{10}\)

By focussing on the repertoire chosen by Auckland Music Theatre and its predecessors, I will examine how the genre of musical theatre based on works of British, American and European origins was gradually introduced. This will explore the changing form, style, content and perspectives of the genre, and thus provide a fitting chronological framework. As part of that process, I will address how both musical theatre and the performers were received by Auckland audiences and critics over the decades.

Key issues related to the evolving cultural milieu will be woven into the study: the ongoing contribution of professional performers to amateur theatre; the sense of community identity; the prospects for social networking created by participation in musical theatre; the educational opportunities for improving technical, performance and communication skills; the constraints of copyright; the influence of the media; and the evolving social tone of Auckland society. To augment the information in the Auckland Music Theatre archives and other sources, twenty-four people who have worked in amateur and/or professional theatre in the Auckland region over several decades were interviewed. Excerpts from a selection of those interviews have been integrated into the chapters that document the history of Auckland Music Theatre.

**Significance of the Study**

This study builds on previous research by John Lowerson (1941-2009), who undertook a definitive study of the social and cultural history of the amateur operatic movement in Great Britain and other parts of the world including New Zealand. Lowerson explains that he was motivated to investigate the history of amateur operatics because of “the marginal role the topic has enjoyed in the social history of leisure which has burgeoned since the 1970s”.\(^\text{11}\) On the one hand, amateur operatics were overlooked in that they were viewed as representatives of “solid middle-class identity at a time when there was a neo-romantic drive to discussing working-class culture in terms of communal

\(^{10}\) Lowerson, *Amateur Operatics: A Social and Cultural History*, 208. At this time, England imported musical offerings from mainland Europe, and acted as a transit depot by passing Anglicised versions to other parts of the world, particularly its colonies.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 3-4.
resistance to bourgeois tastes”. On the other hand, scholars of music history generally concentrate on “musical form or on the professional performance of art music”. This study then, attempts to address the need to capture the contextual development of a somewhat marginal genre in music studies through a microhistory of one notable musical theatre society in New Zealand.

One chapter of Lowerson’s book is devoted to the growth of amateur operatics in Britain’s “former Empire” and mainland Europe. Lowerson devotes two pages to the history of amateur operatic societies in New Zealand. He has relied heavily on internet sources and, consequently, societies such as Auckland Music Theatre, which did not have a website at the time of his book going to press, are not mentioned. The single reference to Auckland acknowledges that an unnamed Auckland Society sent “food parcels to the NODA headquarters’ staff trapped in food rationing” in England during World War II. Records in the archives of Auckland Music Theatre confirm that the unnamed organisation was the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. Lowerson observes that New Zealand amateur musical theatre, in common with Australia, depends almost exclusively on American and British musicals, because very few works from the southern hemisphere have had sufficient appeal. He points out that New Zealand “is still often portrayed somewhat inaccurately as a miniaturised version of older British values and suburbia”. Nevertheless, he claims that New Zealand amateur operatic societies share many common features with those in Britain. Lowerson emphasises that much more research on local musical theatre in New Zealand is required before an accurate picture can emerge.

According to Lowerson, the amateur operatic movement commenced in the 1870s in England, but several societies claim earlier origins. Lowerson examines a range of issues including the somewhat uneasy historic link between dramatic and musical societies, the repertoire of societies, social tone, class aspects, the interaction between amateur and professional theatre, and the far-reaching influence of the National Operatic and Dramatic Association (NODA). He argues that “late-Victorian Britain’s trade with the rest of the world involved far more than material goods or financial services: one of its minor exports was amateur operatics”. The extent of the growth of amateur operatics in

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 217-18.
15 Ibid., 217. The author was in email contact with Lowerson on 8 May 2009, shortly before his death in June 2009. Lowerson commented that owing to space constraints, it had not been possible to include more details. He observed that it had been difficult to find information pertaining to musical theatre in New Zealand, although he had searched the records in the British Museum and at NODA.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 208.
different parts of the world “was determined either by the direct input of British settlers, however temporary, in the Empire or by the efforts of Anglophiles elsewhere”.\(^\text{18}\) A glance at the first census taken in Auckland “towards the end of 1841” reveals that the inhabitants, who were predominantly from the British Isles and New South Wales, Australia, numbered only “1238 males” and “597 females” (Evening Post, 25 September 1913).\(^\text{19}\) Therefore, the entertainment offered in public houses and by amateur theatre, which was instigated by British migrants provided the Europeans with a social outlet and helped to reinforce the ties with Great Britain.

The significance of this study is twofold. It is the first to explore the substantial contribution made by amateur practitioners to the development of musical theatre in the Auckland region. Second, because the archives of Auckland Music Theatre are extensive, it is possible to document and verify how a musical theatre community adapted to changing social, economic and aesthetic issues. Thus, fundamental questions can be answered not only in regard to current day-to-day operations, but also bygone days, based on evolving customs and laws. Moreover, it is possible to examine how the society was shaped by national and international influences.

Lowerson laments that because amateur operatic society records in England are sketchy, or non-existent, it proved difficult to write a history. Therefore, the documents that are stored in the Auckland Music Theatre archives, including detailed minutes of meetings, annual reports, financial records, production manuals, programmes, photographs and newspaper clippings are historically significant. In addition, both the online and library sources, particularly newspapers which date back to the nineteenth century, are a valuable source of information.

Since the colonisation of New Zealand, artistes have been stimulated by travel and exchange, both nationally and internationally: this mobility has shaped the development of musical theatre in New Zealand. Amateur musical theatre societies provide a training ground for aspiring theatre professionals, which is of benefit both to the New Zealand and the international stage. Most people would not be aware that many famous New Zealanders commenced their careers in the ranks of amateur societies: the late Dame Heather Begg, the late Rob Guest, Roger Hall, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Jonathan Lemalu, Derek Metzger, Oscar Natzche and Inia Te Wiata, for instance. Kurt Gänzl, the renowned New Zealand scholar who was domiciled in England for many years, also performed in

\(^{18}\) Lowerson, Amateur Operatics, 209.
\(^{19}\) It seems that there may have been approximately 20,000 Maori in the region, but it is difficult to find reliable data as Maori were not included in the general census until 1951. Maori lived on the outskirts of Auckland because of intertribal warfare.
amateur theatre. Moreover, professional directors, performers and choreographers have been imported sporadically from overseas to assist with amateur productions.

The dependence of New Zealand musical theatre on overseas sources for material provides a considerable source of income for international rights holders, to whom a percentage of box office takings is paid: amateur theatre companies often continue to mount shows which have been long abandoned by professional theatre. Amateur practitioners tend also to travel abroad to view musicals on Broadway and in the West End, amongst other places, swelling audience numbers and adding to the financial coffers of the theatres visited. New Zealand may be geographically isolated, but amateur musical theatre is now part of a global network.20

Musical Theatre Concepts and Definitions

The terminology of musical theatre has undergone many changes, in line with its evolving form, style, content and perspective. Those changes need to be clarified in a microhistorical study of this kind. At this juncture I will provide an overview because the evolution of musical theatre is an integral part of chapters six to nine, where I examine the repertoire chosen by amateur societies in Auckland. Indeed, many societies have modified their name by removing the word “operatic” and substituting “music theatre”, to reflect the changes in the genre. For instance, Auckland Music Theatre was founded as the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society.

Musical theatre is a collaborative art form which includes music, lyrics, book/libretto, choreography, sets, properties, costumes, lighting, sound and technology. Nevertheless, scholars recognise that it is difficult to define musical theatre since the genre overlaps both musically and theatrically with other forms such as opera, operetta, and comic opera. For example, one could argue that opera is normally sung in its original language, be it Italian, French, Russian or German, while musical theatre is sung in the vernacular. Many operas, however, have been performed in translations into the vernacular. Sweeney Todd, by Stephen Sondheim, has been staged by both opera companies and amateur musical theatre societies. Therefore, is Sweeney Todd an opera, or is it musical theatre?

20 Lowerson states that musical theatre societies have been established in the Netherlands and Germany. Moreover, when the author of this thesis visited Brazil in 2011, she noted that the musical Mamma Mia! was staged in the Teatro Abril, Sao Paulo by the Brazilian entertainment company T4F (Time for Fun). The musical had been translated into Portuguese and featured Brazilian performers. To date, T4F has staged The Phantom of the Opera, Chicago, Les Misérables and Miss Saigon, amongst other productions.
Sondheim once suggested that both the venue and the expectations of the audience were important in defining the genre: a show staged on Broadway is a musical but a show staged in an opera house is an opera.\textsuperscript{21} This definition may be accurate in America, England or Europe. However, in Auckland this criterion is difficult to apply, because there are no specific theatres for specific genres: the choice of venue for an opera, musical, or pop concert depends on availability and the audience numbers expected. Professional companies mount musicals and operas in the Aotea Centre or the Civic Theatre, both of which seat 2,200.\textsuperscript{22} Amateur societies, too, use those venues if they consider that box office takings will be sufficient to cover costs. Professional pop concerts are staged either in the Vector Arena or outdoor sports stadiums. Those venues generally seat 12,000-plus.

Musicals may be based on novels, plays or original scripts; depending on the era, they may focus on singing rather than dancing.\textsuperscript{23} In older-style musicals, specially-trained dancers were used for the dance numbers, but in modern musicals performers are expected to sing, dance and act. Increasingly, too, lighting technology, sound effects and spectacular staging are changing the way that live theatre is presented, with more emphasis on the visual aspect. Those changes are apparent in the evolving repertoire of Auckland Music Theatre, which will be discussed in chapters six to nine. However, to appreciate the extensive scope of the genre, it is necessary to consider a range of definitions offered by eminent musicologists.

In his recent comprehensive study of musical theatre, Larry Stempel examines the genre not only as a vehicle for entertainment, but also as a medium that was shaped by the forces of American history and culture.\textsuperscript{24} In common with other scholars, Stempel acknowledges the difficulty of defining musical theatre. He points out that until the 1960s the genre was called “musical comedy”, which was preceded by “light opera” and “comparable terms”.\textsuperscript{25} Nowadays, a musical theatre production tends to be called a “musical”, a term that is defined by Stempel as:

a type of performance made up of the basic creative processes that all such practices have in common. These include, above all, talking (almost always); singing (most often accompanied by unseen instruments); and dancing (generally mixed and interspersed with other kinds of movement).


\textsuperscript{22} His Majesty’s Theatre, which was demolished in the late 1980s, seated 800-plus and was the venue for a range of entertainment that included opera, musicals and plays.

\textsuperscript{23} Some musicals have made the transition from stage to screen and vice versa. For instance, the 1933 screen musical 42nd Street was adapted for the stage in 1980, while the 1949 stage musical South Pacific was adapted for screen in 1958.

\textsuperscript{24} Stempel, Showtime, 2.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
The comparative weights assigned to song, dance, and speech in any musical and how these elements combine or keep their distance throughout reflect different norms. He maintains that because “definitions necessarily change as genres evolve . . . the same show may fit in more than one generic category”, and quotes *Oklahoma!* (1943) as an example: opening night critics referred to the show variously as “a musical comedy, a musical play, an operetta and a folk opera”. Stempel has divided musicals into two categories: those with a storyline and those without. Musicals without a storyline comprise minstrel shows, burlesques, variety, vaudeville and revues, although they differ in terms of structure and style. Story-telling musicals include “plays with added songs, musical comedies, musical plays, operettas and even operas of a certain bent (Broadway, folk, rock.)”. While story-telling musicals depend on narratives for continuity, there are significant differences in structure and style. For instance, in plays with added songs such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* verbal communication is important, but that is not the case in musicals that are sung-through, for instance, *Les Misérables*. Conversely, *Chicago* not only mixes elements of vaudeville, musical comedy, revues and concept musicals but also fully integrates songs and dances. It has been defined as both a musical play and a concept musical.

In his study of the life and music of Rudolf Friml which focuses on the composer’s contributions to American musical theatre, William A. Everett states:

Three fundamental approaches existed within the realm of the Broadway musical during the early decades of the century: revue, musical comedy, and operetta. These were by no means mutually exclusive categories; in fact, it was the ingenious ways in which these genres could and would be cross-fertilized that distinguish many exemplary works of the time.

As Everett points out, revues evolved from “several traditions, including minstrelsy and vaudeville”, while musical comedies were not unlike the revue in approach, “but had linear dramatic plots” with “stories set in the present day, often in New York City or its environs”. Both the revue and musical comedy showcased the current musical trends in America, including Tin Pan Alley, ragtime and social dance. Everett describes operetta as “conceptually escapist works . . . rooted in a Central European world and . . . lavish musical scores filled with waltzes, marches, and various ethnic dances such as Hungarian czardas or Polish mazurka”. He observes also that in operetta the music and singing are

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27 Ibid., 3.
28 Ibid., 4. Stempel has listed the definitions in order of increasing musicality.
30 Ibid., 15.
31 Ibid., 16. Everett points out also that a glamorous ideal world was “central” to operetta with “the idea of ‘Ruritania’, an imaginary locale whose name comes from the setting for Anthony Hope’s novel *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894)”. 

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paramount, whereas in revue and musical comedy other factors are important. It is not implied that music is unimportant in musical comedy but rather that good acting is essential, while in operetta the demanding scores require exemplary singing.

Andrew Lamb and John Snelson define the musical as “the principal form of Western popular musical theatre in the 20th century, in which song and dance musical numbers in popular and pop music styles are combined within a dramatic structure”. According to Lamb and Snelson, the genre was identified with England in its formative years, but is now associated primarily with America. Lamb and Snelson comment that in the 1880s and 1890s, the term “musical comedy” was used for both English and American shows, but that it is difficult to identify its origin. They claim that the term has its “roots in comic opera and operetta, music hall, minstrel shows, vaudeville and burlesque . . . and is further influenced by early popular styles such as ragtime and jazz”. During the first half of the twentieth century, variations such as “musical romance” and “musical play” evolved, with the latter being used mainly to refer to post-Oklahoma! shows where music, drama and dance were integrated.

In his groundbreaking work, Kurt Gänzl discusses the difficulties of trying to define overlapping theatrical genres but identifies musical theatre, or musicals, as belonging to the sphere of “light musical entertainment” in its various guises. The theatre historian Gerald Bordman discusses the development of American musical theatre in parallel with local political and social events, as well as foreign influences. He traces the origin of musical theatre to the Ancient Greeks and Romans, who performed music hand-in-hand with drama. John Kenrick concurs with Bordman’s findings in regard to the link with the Ancient Greeks, but claims that ancient musical theatre has had little direct bearing on the contemporary form.

It is appropriate here to acknowledge the cultural influence of the Savoy operas of W. S. Gilbert (1836-1911) and Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900). The name “Savoy” is derived from the Savoy Theatre in London, which was built by the impresario, Richard D’Oyly Carte, to stage the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. The works have been variously defined as “opera”, “operetta” and “musical theatre”. The New Penguin Opera Guide offers the

33 Ibid., 453.
35 Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 1.
37 Ibid. Although the theatre operated only from October 1881 to June 1891, D’Oyly Carte continued to hold the performing rights to the operas for decades.
following definition: “Operetta is the internationally recognized term for the type of work on which William Schwenck Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan collaborated under Richard D’Oyly Carte’s management (1875-96), but they themselves used the term ‘comic opera’”.\textsuperscript{38} Gilbert and Sullivan’s operas proved popular in England largely because of their “Britishness” and satirical perspective on Victorian conventions. Nevertheless, the operas were influenced in style by the works of the French composer, Offenbach: \textit{Les Brigands} (1869) is sometimes compared with \textit{The Pirates of Penzance} (1879) as the latter shows the influence of the former.\textsuperscript{39}

Stempel, however, states that while Offenbach’s works were popular in America for some years from 1867, they were overshadowed eventually by the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan. Americans were enthused by the premiere of \textit{H.M.S. Pinafore} in November 1878 in Boston, to the extent that productions of the opera burgeoned throughout the country.\textsuperscript{40} At one stage, eight different productions of \textit{Pinafore} were mounted concurrently in New York. However, with the exception of the first production all versions were pirated, because international copyright law had not been established prior to 1891.\textsuperscript{41} Accordingly, the composer and lyricist did not profit from the many productions. Stempel points out also that composers such as Cole Porter, Leonard Bernstein and George Gershwin were influenced by the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan.\textsuperscript{42}

John Bush Jones identifies twentieth-century American musical theatre as both a reflection of, and a challenge to, the “deeply-held cultural attitudes and beliefs” of American society.\textsuperscript{43} He acknowledges, however, that the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan have had a far-reaching influence on the development of musical theatre. He contends that not only were Gilbert and Sullivan “the primary progenitors of the twentieth century American musical” where book, music and lyrics were combined to form an integrated whole, but also that they tackled contemporary social and political issues in an entertaining manner.\textsuperscript{44}

Richard Traubner, too, classifies the works of Gilbert and Sullivan as “comic operas”.\textsuperscript{45} He links the \textit{opéras bouffe} of Jacques Offenbach, the comic operas of Gilbert

\begin{footnotes}
\item[40] Stempel, Showtime, 107-109.
\item[41] Ibid., 110.
\item[42] Ibid., 14, 264, 432. Writers such as Adrian Ross and Owen Hall and composers such as Ivan Caryll, Lionel Monckton and Victor Herbert, amongst others, also were inspired by Gilbert and Sullivan.
\item[43] Jones, Our Musicals Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre, 1.
\item[44] Ibid., 10-11.
\item[45] Traubner, Operetta: A Theatrical History, viii.
\end{footnotes}
and Sullivan, and the operettas of Franz Lehár and Emmerich Kálmán to the romantic American Broadway musicals of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. According to Traubner, all those works share characteristics such as romance, escapism and infectious melodies.\(^\text{46}\) He maintains also that both operetta and the “popular Broadway musical comedies of the past sixty years” were designed not only as entertainment for theatres other than opera houses in a bid to appeal to the masses rather than the elite, but also as commercial vehicles.\(^\text{47}\)

The range of definitions offered above is by no means exhaustive, but illustrates the diversity of musical theatre. In an ideal world it would have been possible to provide an equal number of definitions from British and American scholars, but the latter have generated a much greater volume of literature. The different concepts of musical theatre do, nevertheless, assist in gaining insight and interpretive understanding because they illustrate the historical changes that have taken place. This is reflected in the evolving form, style, content and perspective of the musical. Those changes will be discussed in relation to the Auckland Music Theatre repertoire, showing the shifting influences from Europe, England and America. With the exception of the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan, the contemporary repertoire of the society bears little resemblance to that presented in its early years. This trend is akin to that of amateur operatic societies in England.\(^\text{48}\)

**Amateur and Professional: Concepts and Distinctions**

In commenting on the important role that amateurism has played in New Zealand, John Cowie Reid once famously stated in a public lecture: “Amateurism is a very important element in our artistic heritage . . . as long as it is not amateurish”.\(^\text{49}\) Indeed, the amateur basis for the musical theatre heritage of Auckland is one of its unique strengths, and the legacy of Auckland Music Theatre demonstrates that amateur musical theatre in Auckland transcends notions of the amateurish.

The interaction between amateurs and professionals, and the role of amateurism is one sub-theme that develops from this microhistory. It became clear during the research process that the meaning of the terms “amateur” and “professional” has changed significantly over the decades. The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word “amateur” as “a person who engages in a pursuit, especially sport, on an unpaid basis” or “a person considered inept at a particular activity”. The term “amateurish” is defined as

\(^{46}\) Traubner, *Operetta: A Theatrical History*, viii-x.  
\(^{47}\) Ibid., ix.  
\(^{48}\) Lowerson, *Amateur Operatics*, 75. Lowerson has included a list of productions staged by amateur societies in Britain for over a century.  
\(^{49}\) Cited in Devliotis, *Dancing with Delight*, 144.
“inept or unskilful”, while “amateurism” is defined as “non-professional”.

The word “amateur” is derived from the Latin verb *amo* which means “to love”. Conversely, “professional” is defined as “relating to or belonging to a profession; skilful or competent”, or “engaged in an activity as a paid occupation rather than as an amateur”.

The word “professional” is derived from the Latin verb *profiteri* which means “declare publicly”. It has also a religious connotation as a public avowal of faith, and service to the community. The definitions listed above are merely a selection, as many others in similar vein abound in various dictionaries.

It is of interest that the *Good Night Vienna* (1947) programme featured an article that explained the meaning and role of amateurs, and claimed that the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society had upheld the noble principles (figure 1).

In a lecture presented at the University of London in 1938, F. H. Shera explained the etymology of the word “amateur”.

Shera observed that musical amateurs had had a higher status historically than professionals, and that “eighteenth-century English designates the amateur as a ‘dilettante’ [a lover of fine arts], the professional as a ‘professor’”. He observed that towards the end of the eighteenth century it was customary to describe an amateur musician as a gentleman player, because he usually came from the wealthy upper echelons of society: he could thus afford the luxury of playing music for pleasure. The professional, on the other hand, was paid for his services

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51 Ibid., 1145.
52 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
because he could not afford to perform free of charge. Consequently, he had a lower status than the amateur. This concept has changed gradually: nowadays, the amateur has a lower status than the paid professional, and is sometimes treated quite unjustly as a mere dabbler who does not take his art seriously. Nevertheless, as noted by Finnegan in her study of Milton Keynes, most musicians gain their experience in the amateur arena.

Robert A. Stebbins provides an in-depth analysis of the evolving meanings of the terms “amateur” and “professional”, in an article published in 1977. The study was based both on research and on his experience as an amateur musician and amateur athlete. Stebbins suggests that two popular, if somewhat simplistic, ways of distinguishing the amateur from the professional have emerged: “(1) The professional gains at least 50% of his livelihood from his pursuits while the amateur, at the most, only supplements a principal source of income earned elsewhere. (2) The professional spends considerably more time at his pursuit than does the amateur”. Stebbins claims that those two explanations provide “useful operational definitions for certain research questions”. Nevertheless, they do not take into account other factors such as status, attitude and standards. Nor do they consider the interaction between amateurs, professionals and their publics. Stebbins defines “publics” as “clients” or “groups of people with a common interest” who interact with both amateurs and professionals. Thus, publics may be either audiences, or sponsors who offer financial support. In return, the amateurs and professionals offer their services in the form of entertainment. Not uncommonly, amateurs and professionals serve the same sponsors and audiences. This is true in the Auckland region. In turn, amateurs may also serve as audiences for professionals and vice versa. Moreover, amateurs and professionals interact by appearing in the same productions. Amateur societies, too, hire professionals to educate, train, direct or advise their members. Indeed, this has been a common trend in the history of Auckland Music Theatre.

Stebbins has attempted to develop two broad definitions of the amateur that more accurately differentiate him from the professional: (1) macrosociological, where the amateur is identified as part of a “professional-amateur-public system of functionally

56 Ibid., 585.
57 Ibid., 601.
58 Ibid., 584.
interdependent relationships”; and (2) social-psychological, where the amateur is
differentiated from the professional, based on five attitudes.\(^{59}\)

In developing a macrosociological definition, Stebbins uses seven characteristics to
categorise the professional in “ideal-typical terms”: (1) an ability to create a unique
product; (2) an extensive knowledge of a “specialised technique”; (3) “a sense of identity
with their colleagues”; (4) a dedication to their art; (5) a mastery of the cultural tradition in
their field; (5) the use of “institutionalised means of validating adequacy of training and
competence of trained individuals”; (6) an emphasis on “standards and service rather than
material rewards”; (7) recognition by their “clients” of their professional authority based
on knowledge and technique”.\(^{60}\) Stebbins concludes, nevertheless, that many amateurs
also display the seven characteristics listed above. Consequently, the line between
amateurs and professionals is blurred.

In developing a social-psychological definition, Stebbins argues that professionals
may be differentiated from amateurs by using five attitudes as a guide: “confidence,
perseverance, preparedness, continuance commitment, and self-conception”.\(^{61}\) The
inference is that amateurs are more self-doubting than professionals; that amateurs do not
have the levels of perseverance displayed by professionals; that amateurs do not display
the high degree of preparedness which characterises professionals; that amateurs do not
have the pressure of continuance commitment because it is not their fulltime occupation;
and that a person’s own perception of himself as either a professional or an amateur
defines his status.

Stebbins acknowledges that not all professionals achieve the highest level in all five
categories, despite the fact that they set and communicate the standards. Nevertheless, he
suggests that the social-psychological approach, rather than the macrosociological one, is
a more precise way of measuring the difference between professionals and amateurs. All
the same, nowadays some amateurs do fulfil most, or all, of the above criteria. This type of
amateur may be categorised as practising “modern amateurism”: the modern amateur no
longer “plays” at a pastime but sees the opportunity to make it his “central activity”, often
in a paid capacity.\(^{62}\) It may, therefore, lead to his eventually becoming a professional.
Indeed, he takes his leisure pursuit seriously and achieves a similar level of satisfaction to

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 585. Stebbins acknowledges that he summarised the terms based on the works of Gross,
Parsons and Kaplan. Those references are noted fully in the Bibliography.
\(^{61}\) Ibid., 596.
\(^{62}\) Ibid., 582.
that of the professional. The twenty-four people who were interviewed during the course of research for this thesis bear testimony to that, as will be discussed in chapter two.

There is also the category of “pro-am”, a term which is commonly used in sport, for instance in golf, when amateurs and professionals play together. In theatre, too, as has been the case in the Auckland region since the 1840s, amateurs and professionals do perform in the same production. Another category is “semi-professional”, where a singer, for example, does not derive an income solely from performing but receives a fee for each appearance. This is unlike fulltime professionals who earn a regular salary.

Another point arises in the amateur/professional juxtaposition: the question of payment, both direct and indirect, which is a vexed one. In golf, for instance, amateurs compete in national and international tournaments, and reach a very high standard. However, if they receive payment in any form, they lose their amateur status which can never be regained. Consequently, they are forced to either play professionally if they qualify, or not at all. Sponsorship is regarded as payment, as are gifts.\textsuperscript{63}

In relation to amateur societies, a payment in the form of an honorarium or expenses for various committee posts such as chairman, secretary and treasurer is not uncommon. Nevertheless, an honorarium is not generally regarded as payment in the same light as a salary or a wage. Amateur theatrical societies are required to register with the Charities Commission as a charitable institution, in order to gain a tax exemption. Thus, the Inland Revenue Department has strict rules in place to ensure that no member of an amateur society such as Auckland Music Theatre gains a pecuniary advantage.

The aesthetic and social aspect of participation in amateur theatre, however, is also important. Amateur theatre provides people with an opportunity not only for self-expression, but also for forming friendships and creating a sense of community. Moreover, they can pursue an activity to which they are partial with a likeminded, committed group. For some, there is the possibility of pursuing a professional career after gaining experience in amateur theatre.

Stebbins states that amateurs are commonly regarded as enjoying their chosen pursuit because it is a leisure activity.\textsuperscript{64} This, in turn, implies that professionals do not gain pleasure from their chosen career. Nonetheless, amateurs can become bored or frustrated with their leisure activity. In addition, Stebbins observes that the modern amateur is not

\textsuperscript{63} This became clear recently when the top young amateur golfer in New Zealand, Lydia Ko, was seeking finance for an overseas tournament. She could not gain sponsorship or accept gifts without losing her amateur status.

\textsuperscript{64} Stebbins, “The Amateur: Two Sociological Definitions”, 582.
averse to receiving payment, and can earn a considerable amount of money. Therefore, the amateur/professional relationship can be distorted if it is gauged only in terms of slight versus absolute dedication, little versus great skill, or leisure versus paid employment. He concludes that while those criteria can apply in some instances, it is necessary to take a broader perspective and view the amateur as a member of a professional-amateur-public system and as one who has distinct attitudes.

The relationship between amateurs and professionals forms an important part of this thesis, although the distinction between amateurs and professionals is not a clear cut one. John Lowerson observes that in 1960 one organisation in England arranged a competition for performers, but had difficulty in ascertaining the meaning of “amateur”. It was decided that an amateur could be defined as “one who does not derive the chief part of his income from the teaching or practice of any branch of elocution”. However, the theatre magazine, *Amateur Stage*, reported that under that criterion both Sir Laurence Olivier and Dame Flora Robson would be classified as amateurs.

### Geographical and Historical Backdrop

New Zealand is a geographically isolated country located in the South Pacific Ocean. Its nearest European neighbour is Australia, 2,161 kilometres to the west. New Zealand has a land mass of 271,000 km², and consists of three main islands: the North Island, the South Island and Stewart Island. The North and South Islands are separated by 20 kilometres of water, the treacherous Cook Strait; while the South and Stewart Islands are separated by Foveaux Strait which varies from 25 to 45 kilometres in width. Although travel between the islands nowadays is by air or sea, the only option in the nineteenth century and early twentieth was a sea voyage. The mountainous terrain, moreover, made overland travel difficult. Consequently, the population which was scattered throughout New Zealand predominantly along the coastline, tended to live in isolated enclaves. People established their own community activities, including musical

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67 Ibid., 181.
68 This is the distance between Auckland and Sydney.
and theatrical entertainment. The seventy-five amateur musical theatre groups that are present members of Musical Theatre New Zealand (MTNZ), an umbrella organisation, are scattered throughout the North and South Islands.

It is noteworthy that theatre was established in Auckland almost immediately after colonisation, because from its inception the city has been perceived as a materialistic commercial community, rather than an arts-oriented cultural one. Why? The main factor was the initial land dealing in 1840 Auckland, which was regarded as questionable by those outside the region. Indeed, it was considered that the first Auckland settlers were not genuine colonists but “men on the make” who had migrated temporarily to earn as much money as possible before returning to their native land. This perception was reinforced by the fact that the first European inhabitants of Auckland were merchants and entrepreneurs who bought and sold land with remarkable rapidity, apparently in an effort to exploit the unwary. The population, too, was largely transient.

As Russell Stone observed in his study of the early Auckland colonial business community “the naked speculative spirit on parade at the first auctions and the hurried and highly profitable sales of allotments soon after have been supposed to have established the mood of the settlement”, which was one of dubious commercial morality. Stone pointed out, nonetheless, that it may be that “Aucklanders had more amply than fellow New Zealanders not acquisitiveness, but need and opportunity”. There is also another point: successful entrepreneurs often become generous benefactors of the arts. During the course of research, it became clear that many successful businesspeople not only supported the performing arts financially, but also participated either onstage or backstage. This is apparent from the time that the Auckland Amateur Opera Club was established in the 1880s, as will be discussed in chapter four.

June 2009, the total population of New Zealand was 4.3 million: 3.2 million in the North Island; 1.02 million in the South Island; approximately 450 in Stewart Island, where the permanent population varies from season to season; and the remainder in outlying islands.

72 Stone, Makers of Fortune: A Colonial Business Community and its Fall, 6. Stone, Logan Campbell’s Auckland, 6. The government had purchased the land on which Auckland was sited from the Maori tribe, Ngati Whatua. Owing to intertribal warfare at the time, Maori were living on the outskirts. The site on which Auckland is located was chosen by Captain Hobson, lieutenant-governor of the colony, because of its easy access to two harbours, a water supply and fertile land. Auckland was considered an artificial town, as it was unplanned and grew haphazardly. It was perceived as being bound together purely by commercial interests. This was unlike Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin which were planned cities: some of the migrants were well-to-do and were perceived to have established traditions and a sense of community almost immediately. Settlers in other parts of New Zealand, especially Wellington, argued that the colonial government supported Auckland at their expense. Wellingtonians considered that their town, which predated Auckland, should have been declared the capital.

74 Stone, Makers of Fortune: A Colonial Business Community and its Fall, 6. Ibid.

75 Ibid.
Theatrical Backdrop

Musical theatre has become a genre of global significance on its odyssey through Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States of America to locations as remote as New Zealand. Notwithstanding the geographical isolation of New Zealand, coupled with its unique mixture of British colonial and Maori heritage, musical theatre has become firmly entrenched. This is despite the ever-increasing ethnic diversity of the Auckland region, bolstered by migrants from the Pacific islands.\(^{76}\)

In line with global trends, evolving technology such as the telegraph, gramophone, radio, movies and television has proved influential in promoting musical theatre, particularly in the twentieth century. Many of the programmes broadcast in New Zealand have been imported from the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Europe. Modern American television shows such as *Glee* highlight the latest musical trends. *New Zealand’s Got Talent*, a reality show based on its British and American counterparts, promotes local talent: performers entering those shows have often honed their skills on the amateur stage.

Furthermore, during the past forty years there has been an increased use of CDs, DVDs, cell phones, and information and communications technology. Those technological changes have been coupled with the high-impact marketing of Disney, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh. Moreover, increased overseas travel by New Zealanders, particularly after World War II, has kept them abreast of developments in the musical theatre arena. It is not unusual for Aucklanders to fly to Sydney or Melbourne on a regular basis to view musicals, as the flight time is less than three hours. Visits to New York and London, amongst other places, are also not uncommon.\(^{77}\)

As well as providing entertainment, musical theatre has proved an important medium for conveying historical, political, social and cultural information, as is reflected in the wide spectrum of issues highlighted across the genre. For instance, *Fiddler on the Roof*, which premiered in New York in 1964, illumines nationhood, race, power, class

\(^{76}\) Many ethnic groups have their own strong music and dance culture which is celebrated in multicultural festivals such as Pasifika, held annually in Auckland. There have been many changes to immigration laws, particularly after World War II when refugees from various parts of the world were welcomed into New Zealand. From the 1970s, Pacific Island and Asian migration in separate waves has increased significantly. In the 1840s, migrants were mainly from the British Isles with a small number of Chinese, Indians (with British citizenship) and Continental Europeans.

\(^{77}\) Statisticians are fond of pointing out that although the population of New Zealand is five million, one million live abroad, scattered all over the world.
differences and migration. These issues transcend time and place.78 *Ragtime, West Side Story* and *Show Boat* highlight racial issues; *Carousel* and *Hairspray* emphasise social pressures. These are but a few examples. It is noteworthy that while the repertoire of Auckland Music Theatre has changed radically over the decades, it does tend to reflect productions that embrace universal themes, as noted in the case of *Fiddler on the Roof*. There are several reasons which dictate the choice of repertoire: the availability of shows as permitted by the copyright holders; budget constraints; the availability of directors, musical directors, choreographers, performers, technical crew and theatres; and the whims of committee members. Those issues are discussed in chapters six to nine.

**The Nineteenth-Century Auckland Stage**

Musical theatre performance requires skilful acting, singing and dancing. Therefore, the combined talents of many people and performing arts groups in the Auckland region have contributed to the development of the amateur musical theatre movement. The first public theatrical entertainment was David Osborne’s production featuring songs and dances at the disreputable Bluebell Inn, Queen Street, in 1841.79 This was based on the type of entertainment offered to the working classes in England in the minor theatres. Other important markers include the reputable vocal/instrumental classes that were taught from 1843 by Thomas Outhwaite (1805-79), who was the first registrar of the Supreme Court; and the Military Theatre and Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society, both founded in 1848. The Fifty-eighth Regimental Band, too, played an important role from the 1840s, because it supplied many of the musicians for both amateur and professional performances.80

In addition, professional actors such as George Buckingham (1810-?), who contributed his expertise to both professional and amateur theatre from 1843, set a precedent that has continued into 2009, where amateur productions not infrequently have input from professionals. The Auckland Choral Society, established in 1855, was a good general musical training ground for members.81 Initially the repertoire was based largely on British choral music and oratorio, but it expanded over the years to include operetta and

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78 *Fiddler on the Roof* has been staged three times by Auckland Music Theatre: in 1973, 1978 and 1993. An overseas professional troupe brought the musical to Auckland in 2009, with Topol as the star. It played to packed houses in the 2,200-seat Civic Theatre.
80 After the troops had departed, many of the musicians remained in Auckland and established local bands and orchestras.
81 Groups such as the Auckland Philharmonic and the Auckland Harmonic Society, amongst others, all of which pre-dated the Auckland Amateur Opera Club also reinforced the musical foundation as they provided an opportunity for people to both train and perform.
opera in concert performance. Not only did the choral society provide scope for singers, but also it formed its own orchestra, with the assistance of the regiment.

The Auckland Amateur Opera Club, with which Auckland Music Theatre claims a link, operated for eighteen years from 1883/1884 to 1902 but did not stage its first production until 1885. The repertoire consisted mainly of the Savoy operas of Gilbert and Sullivan. At the time, those works were considered an elite and fashionable entertainment, and were staged in the West End theatres of London as opposed to the minor theatres. While numerous overseas professional companies had presented the works of Gilbert and Sullivan in Auckland prior to the founding of the opera club, it was the first time that a local amateur society had done so on a regular basis. It was an ambitious undertaking because of the high standard of singing and acting required. The Auckland Amateur Opera Club ceased operations in 1902, but appears to have been the longest surviving local theatrical society in Auckland at the time.

The Twentieth-Century Auckland Stage

Auckland did lag behind smaller New Zealand towns that had formed amateur musical theatre societies in the late nineteenth century: several societies had been established in Auckland from the time of colonisation, but none had survived. It is only since 1919, when the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society commenced operations that musicals have been mounted regularly by the same society for ninety years and beyond.\(^{82}\) The society has staged a wide range of musicals, revues, concerts, plays and ballets of European, British, American, Australian and New Zealand origin. Two inner-city amateur societies that are now defunct, the Auckland Light Opera Club (1940-89) and Theatre Arts (1960-66), were strong competitors for a time. Both collapsed, however, largely because of financial difficulties.

The delineation between straight theatre and musical theatre was blurred for much of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, while there is a clearer demarcation nowadays, many amateur musical societies in Auckland perform plays as well as musicals. Auckland Music Theatre is a case in point. Several of the twenty-four people who were interviewed in the course of research for this thesis have spent much of their lifetime moving between straight and musical theatre.

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\(^{82}\) Some societies that exist in 2009 and pre-dated the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society include: AMDRAM Musical Theatre, Wanganui, 1874 (set up initially as a drama group); Napier Operatic Society, 1886; Musical Theatre Gisborne, 1892 (amalgamated with Gisborne Theatre in 2007). (The websites are listed in the Bibliography.)
The productions of amateur musical societies in the Auckland region have keenly followed, and attempted to emulate, the trends of the West End in London and Broadway in New York. It may seem pretentious to link amateurs with the West End and Broadway, but the only arena in which many accomplished performers can hone their live theatre skills in Auckland is on the amateur stage. Consequently, because of the high standard of amateur musical theatre in Auckland (and New Zealand), organisations such as Hal Leonard have granted special dispensation to mount shows that are not always available to amateurs in the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

In order to gain this special dispensation, the societies have had considerable support from Musical Theatre New Zealand (MTNZ), a non-profit national organisation that is registered with the Charities Commission. Only one paid administrator, based in Wellington, is employed by the organisation. All other labour is voluntary. The organisation lobbies government agencies such as Creative New Zealand for funding for amateur theatre. Although MTNZ receives grants periodically, it relies heavily on sponsorship from companies such as John Herber Limited and NZ Fire Shield.

The organisation was established in 1960 as the New Zealand Federation of Operatic Societies and is the umbrella group for community theatre, schools, and companies associated with the theatre and entertainment industry. Membership is voluntary. In 2009, MTNZ claimed 151 members throughout New Zealand: 75 musical theatre/repertory societies; 24 corporates, including Australian copyright holders Hal Leonard, Origin Theatrical and Dominie; 37 schools and theatre education institutions; and 15 associate members.

An annual fee is payable by members. To function effectively, MTNZ has divided New Zealand into five geographical zones, based on the size of the population in each area and the number of musical theatre societies (Appendix 1). Auckland has nine societies that are members of MTNZ (Appendix 2). Each zone has a representative who is elected by the societies in that zone. Regular meetings, which are attended by representatives who report back to their members, are held in Wellington. An annual conference is held each year in a different centre.

The organisation has a comprehensive website, which offers a wide range of services including advice on copyright issues, perusal copies of scores, audition notices, and the availability of shows, directors, musical directors, choreographers and technical

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83 Ghent and Nagy, eds., Gaffer Tape and Greasepaint, 93. Member societies paid a foundation levy of four guineas ($8.40) each.
84 Ibid., 8.
85 There are some smaller theatrical societies such as Mairangi Players, the Torbay Dramatic Society, Ellerslie Theatrical Society and the Dolphin Theatre that occasionally perform musicals.
Performing arts training workshops and annual conferences are also organised by MTNZ. Since 1976, a variety of awards for amateur theatre have been offered: best poster, best programme, best showbill and best website; merit awards for members who have provided outstanding support for amateur theatre for at least twenty-five years; and the Nola Speir Patron’s Encouragement Award for young people. The organisation also issues a regular newsletter called Spotlight, which features articles from societies throughout New Zealand and theatre news from abroad. Spotlight was first published in August 1961 in print form, but has been recently converted to a digital format. Auckland Music Theatre was a founding member of MTNZ, and has helped to shape its history.

An important landmark in recognising the high standard of musical theatre in Auckland and Northland was the creation of the Northern Area Performance Theatre Award (NAPTA) Charitable Trust in 2001. Awards in twenty-two categories are bestowed annually, with the aim of encouraging participants to develop their skills and expertise, either in New Zealand or overseas. Participating societies nominate the shows they wish to have judged over a twelve-month period. Five judges, chosen for their experience in performing, directing and/or technical aspects, are appointed for a two-year term to travel around the Northland and Auckland regions to view the nominated shows. Auckland Music Theatre has been the recipient of many awards.

Fundamental changes to the government school curriculum, too, have raised the profile of the performing arts. Since 2002, the Performance Programmes in Music, Dance and Drama have been included in the curriculum for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), the mainstream high-school qualification in New Zealand. Many students augment their learning of the official school curriculum with private tuition.

**Literature Review**

As the emphasis is on the history of amateur musical theatre in the Auckland region, with particular reference to Auckland Music Theatre, this review will target relevant local and national texts rather than ones that focus on the history of European operetta, the British musical and the American musical. (Indeed, international publications have been discussed to a limited extent earlier in this chapter under “Musical Theatre

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88 Personal interview with Stephen Rowe, 15 June 2007.
Concepts and Definitions.” Nevertheless, European operetta, the British musical and the American musical have provided the foundation for the repertoire of amateur musical theatre societies in the Auckland region. Consequently, those overseas influences will form an integral part of my study.

A very limited number of books recognise the contribution of amateur musical theatre to the cultural life of Auckland. *Gaffer Tape and Greasepaint: 50 Years of Musical Theatre in New Zealand*, compiled by Kate Ghent and Allan Nagy, provides a comprehensive account of the activities of MTNZ from 1960 to 2010. In so doing, it shows how the organisation was forced to adapt to the changing times, taking social, economic and aesthetic issues into account. It has provided substantial support for musical societies throughout the country over the past fifty years. During that time, MTNZ has created a keen sense of community identity. As a founding member, Auckland Music Theatre features prominently in the publication: it serves to reinforce the significant contribution of the society to the history of musical theatre in New Zealand.

*Dancing with Delight* by Cherie Devliotis examines the lives of a selection of dancers from the 1920s to the 1940s in Auckland, set against the background of the Hollywood musical and a limited social history. Many of the dancers mentioned, including Doreen Yalland (nee O’Leary), Cecil Hall, Beryl Nettleton, Bettina Edwards and Rowena Jackson, performed with the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society and were instrumental in establishing reputable dancing schools. Devliotis, too, acknowledges the important role that the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society played in the theatrical and social life of Auckland in providing a venue for dancers to hone their skills. The photographs in her book provide a valuable historical record of several musical productions mounted by the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. This dance study also provides a useful parallel historical context of the development of a performing arts community in Auckland over two decades.

*Fantasy and Folly* by Peter Harcourt (1923-95) focuses on musicals composed by New Zealanders from 1880 to 1940, placing the history in the context of early New Zealand settlement. Included in Harcourt’s comprehensive study are two musicals, *Tutankhamen* (1923, 1924 and 1930) and *The Abbess of Whitby* (1925), both of which were written for, and staged by, the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. Nevertheless, Harcourt focuses on the New Zealand musical rather than the contribution of amateur musical theatre to the cultural life of Auckland. Harcourt’s findings are significant not only in terms of expanding the canon of works in regard to New Zealand musical theatre but also in his acknowledgement of overseas influences, particularly the British musical,
on the topics and format of the New Zealand musical. Moreover, he presents a convincing argument in asserting that modern musical theatre developed from burlesque, although this view is not necessarily shared by other scholars.

_A Dramatic Appearance: New Zealand Theatre 1920-1970_ by Harcourt pays a fitting tribute to amateur theatre enthusiasts in New Zealand during a fifty-year period and comments on their high standards, which Harcourt considers to be comparable with professional English repertory. He discusses also the fierce competition to live theatre offered by radio, cinema and television.

_Top of the Bill: Entertainers through the Years_ by Peter Downes describes well known past and present performers, many of whom have appeared in both amateur and professional productions. Downes, however, mentions amateur musical theatre only where a specific show provides a vehicle for a particular performer. Nevertheless, it does reinforce the point that it is not unusual for performers in the Auckland region (and New Zealand) to participate in both professional and amateur theatre. While the study provides specific examples of theatre productions, it does not develop conceptual issues.

_Shadows on the Stage_ by Peter Downes explores the first seventy years of New Zealand professional theatre, including musicals, from 1840 to 1910 and acknowledges the contribution of amateur theatre. However, very little information on theatre in the Auckland region is provided. As the author was based in Wellington this may be one of the reasons why Auckland does not have a higher profile in his book.

_The New Zealand Stage 1891-1900_ by John E. Thomson catalogues in chronological order, both amateur and professional theatrical productions performed throughout New Zealand during a ten-year period. The Auckland Amateur Opera Club listings include the names of productions and the dates of performances. In addition, the dates of overseas premieres and the names of composers are noted. Thomson acknowledges that the information was compiled from local newspapers. Nevertheless, the book is of documentary value and proved a useful source for cross-checking dates.

_Music and the Stage in New Zealand: A Century of Entertainment 1840-1943_ by Maurice Hurst provides a summary of musical, dramatic and cultural activities, both professional and amateur, throughout New Zealand. Hurst, however, provides a good general reference manual rather than a comprehensive history. All the same, it is an important record of theatre pioneers, performers and productions during the era documented.

Four other books are worthy of mention in that there is a link with amateur musical theatre, albeit tangential. _Hallelujahs and History_ by Adrienne Simpson (1943-2010)
records the history of the Auckland Choral Society from 1855 to 2005 and is included here because some of its members were instrumental in setting up the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. For example, British-born Colin Muston (1876-1948), was the longest-serving musical director of the operatic society. Moreover, Francis Dart Fenton (1821-98) was an important early stalwart of the choral society and a founding member of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club. In *Opera’s Farthest Frontier*, Simpson examines the history of professional opera in New Zealand but observes that works such as *H.M.S. Pinafore* by Gilbert and Sullivan were performed also by amateur musical theatre companies, particularly after World War I. However, she explains that “the activities of such companies [amateur operatic societies] lie outside the scope” of her book.  

*The Pollards* by Peter Downes relates the thirty-year history of the professional Pollard Opera Company, which was based in Australia, but toured extensively throughout New Zealand at the turn of the twentieth century. While the book does not deal directly with amateur theatre, there is a connection with the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society in that Tom Pollard, who was a strong supporter of amateurs, sponsored and produced the inaugural production, *The Gondoliers*. It illustrates also the interaction between amateurs and professionals, a theme that is explored in this thesis. Moreover, both Eva Moore and Marion Mitchell, who had been child performers with the Pollards, had direct input into the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. Mitchell was an inaugural committee member and Moore was the producer of *Katinka* in 1945.

Three theses are also relevant. A *Social History of Auckland, 1840-53*, by J. R. Phillips, provides a comprehensive study of the social history of Auckland from 1840 to 1853. Phillips devotes two chapters to entertainment and cultural aspects, divided into sensual and rational pleasures. Theatrical activities, including David Osborne’s entertainments, Thomas Outhwaite and the Mechanics’ Institute, George Buckingham and the amateur dramatic societies are included under the chapter of “sensual pleasures”. Phillips states there were differences between the entertainment enjoyed by fashionable society on the one hand and the working classes on the other hand. He explains that fashionable society provided its own entertainment with “at home” concerts and/or social gatherings at venues such as Government House. Conversely, men from the working classes frequented public houses, which is not to say that men from fashionable circles were averse to visiting those venues. Moreover, some respectable hostelries hired out a special long room for use by fashionable society. These issues are raised in my thesis.

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89 Simpson, *Opera’s Farthest Frontier*, 11.
Music in Auckland, 1840-1855 by Angela R. Annabell examines the contribution made to the cultural milieu by early pioneers. She discusses the band of the Fifty-eighth Regiment, the vocal and instrumental classes tutored by Thomas Outhwaite at the Mechanics’ Institute, the Auckland Sacred Harmonic Society and the Auckland Choral Society. Annabell comments on the strong link with England. She quotes as an example the Sacred Harmonic Society, which followed the pattern of oratorio performances staged in London with its emphasis on the music of George Frideric Handel (1685-1759).  

Annabell points out that the Buckingham Family presented concerts from 1853 to 1855, but does not mention that they performed in both professional and amateur theatre from 1843. However, she does suggest that local drama groups, with a programme of farces and melodrama interspersed with songs and dances, ultimately provided overwhelming competition for choral groups. Annabell claims, nevertheless, that Thomas Outhwaite’s tireless efforts in fostering music were in harmony “with the ancient Platonic doctrine of music as a morally elevating influence”, a view endorsed by the local press of the day. She contends that those activities helped to lay the groundwork for the social and moral foundations of Auckland. Undoubtedly, Outhwaite’s music classes were an important part of the emerging cultural environment of Auckland, and did provide a foundation for musical theatre, as will be discussed in chapter three.

Theatre in Colonial Auckland, 1870-71 by Karen A. Sherry explores a variety of topics including Shakespearean plays, imported circus acts, dioramas and minstrel shows, which were popular Auckland pursuits. Although she examines some plays that were written locally, as well as the various theatres in which they were staged, she does not name local amateur dramatic or musical societies. Sherry does, nevertheless, indicate that amateurs who performed with the professionals were paid on occasion. This confirms the claims made by newspapers during the period. The payment of so-called amateurs and the relationship with professionals is one of the themes in my study.

Some histories of Auckland musical and theatrical societies are readily available. For instance, the history of the Papakura Theatre Company, entitled Once Upon a Time … 1954-2004, was written by Lorna Clauson to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the society. Centrestage Theatre Company (Orewa) released a brief history in booklet form, to celebrate their fiftieth anniversary in 2006. The websites of many amateur musical

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92 Ibid., 120.
93 Ibid., 61.
94 Ibid., 34.
societies provide individual potted histories: Auckland Music Theatre, Centrestage Theatre Company (Orewa), Harlequin Musical Theatre, Manukau Performing Arts, North Shore Music Theatre, Papakura Theatre Company, Pilgrim Players, the Playhouse Theatre and Pukekohe Light Opera Club.\footnote{The websites are listed in the Bibliography.}

The fact that there is such a sparse collection of musical theatre publications which mention the contribution of amateur musical theatre in the Auckland region merely confirms the need for a study such as this thesis.

**Thesis Structure**

The thesis contains ten chapters. This introductory chapter outlined the focus of the thesis. A geographical, historical and theatrical backdrop was included, as was a discussion of literature in relation to local amateur musical theatre. This was necessary, in order to present an informed cultural awareness. Moreover, the significance of the study has been addressed, as have been key terms.

Chapter two discusses the methodology used, and presents the research question in its conceptual structure. It provides justification for using a microhistorical approach; the historical research techniques used; the sources of data including documents from the Auckland Music Theatre archives, private collections and public institutions; oral interviews; procedures/data collection; and data analysis and verification.

Chapters three to nine are in chronological order. Chapter three explores the humble beginnings of theatre in the frontier town of Auckland from 1841 to 1882. David Osborne’s theatrical production, the regimental bands, George Buckingham’s professional and amateur theatre groups, Thomas Outhwaite’s vocal classes, the Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society, the Military Theatre and the Auckland Choral Society are discussed within the context of the social and cultural development of Auckland. The influence of British musical and theatrical traditions, the gradual acceptance of theatre as a respectable activity and amateur/professional theatrical interaction are the fundamental issues raised. This chapter shows how the various musical and theatrical activities laid the foundation for both the Auckland Amateur Opera Club and the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society.

Chapter four discusses the establishment, and eventual demise, of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club from 1883 to 1902, its repertoire and the rivalry with other societies. Auckland Music Theatre claims the opera club as its predecessor.\footnote{Auckland Centennial Music Festival 1940 programme, 10, Auckland City Library.} Central to this chapter is the contentious issue of the payment of so-called amateur performers and the all-
pervading influence of certain personalities in the club, which was a constant source of criticism by newspaper critics. To provide continuity into the era of Auckland Music Theatre, founded as the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society in 1919, some amateur theatrical productions that followed in the wake of the demise of the opera club are discussed. This encompasses the period from 1903 to 1918.

Five chapters are devoted to the history of Auckland Music Theatre from 1919 to 2009. They show how the society adapted to the changing social, economic and aesthetic issues affecting the realm of musical theatre, in an evolving urban environment. Chapter five provides a general overview of the society. This chapter is essential, because the information is too detailed to place in the opening introduction. It describes the various theatres in which productions were staged, the locations where the society was domiciled and the modus operandi. The repertoire over ninety years is compared, with analyses by genre, era and national origin of musicals, noting trends such as the rising popularity of American musicals, strengthened by the introduction of the Hollywood musical.

Each of chapters six, seven, eight and nine encompasses a different time frame in the history of the society, in chronological order: chapter six, 1919 to 1945; chapter seven, 1946 to 1969; chapter eight, 1970 to 1992; and chapter nine, 1993 to 2009. The timeframes for the chapters were chosen carefully: each chapter heralds the beginning of an era, be it based on major global events such as World War II and/or the relocation of the headquarters of the society.

The two-part division of chapters six to nine reflects the title of this thesis “Both Sides of the Curtain: Auckland Music Theatre Inc. 1919-2009”. As the word “showbusiness” consists of two parts, “show” and “business”, the concept is that the show is presented on one side of the curtain, while the business side is executed on the other. Accordingly, the study investigates both the changing circumstances of the “show” and the evolving forces that have affected the “business”.98 The first part of the chapter focuses on general business including policies, finances, marketing strategies and legal matters. The second part discusses the choice of repertoire in relation to the West End and Broadway, the evolving style of musicals, including technological changes, and the use of different theatre spaces. These all had an impact on the types of productions which were staged by the society: for instance, smaller venues precluded the staging of shows with

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98 The idea for the title came from a newsletter entitled “On Both Sides of the Curtain”, which was issued to members by the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society in 1947. The author is aware that while the term “both sides of the curtain” was originally a common theatrical one, this changed after World War II with the advent of the political term “iron curtain” which divided east from west. After that, the term “both sides of the curtain” had political connotations. However, in this thesis, the term is used in purely theatrical terms.
large casts. Where it has been possible to substantiate the evidence from the minutes or other documents of the society, reasons are provided for the success or failure of particular productions. The reception by newspaper critics and audiences is also addressed.

Chapter six, 1919 to 1945, traces the founding of the society after the end of World War I, the establishment of policies, committees and repertoire, and the purchase of its first premises at 33 Grafton Road, Grafton Gully (the Hall).

Chapter seven, 1946 to 1969, discusses the changes in policy and repertoire following World War II. Those changes include the effect on the society of the urban sprawl, the forced relocation to new premises in the old synagogue (the Gog) because of the motorways which were built in the inner city, and the establishment of the Auckland Musical Arts Trust to safeguard assets.

Chapter eight, 1970 to 1993, examines the struggles of the society, including the financial crisis when it relocated to the Gog on the corner of Princes Street and Bowen Avenue. It discusses the touring company, the issue of the homelessness of the society for a period of six years and the eventual construction of premises in the inner western suburbs. The rise of professional theatre and suburban societies is also addressed.

Chapter nine, 1994 to 2009, the final historical chapter, describes the many adjustments which were necessary to ensure the survival of the society in its new theatre, the Westpoint Performing Arts Centre (the Tin Shed), at 40 Meola Road, Western Springs. This includes adapting the choice of repertoire to new premises, restructuring the committee to bring it into line with the times, coping with the increased competition from suburban societies and schools and finding a new audience. The key issues of the evolving repertoire, the contribution of professionals to amateur theatre, the sense of community identity that was established, the constraints of copyright, the influence of the media and the social tone of Auckland society will be embedded in the discussion.

Chapter ten draws together the main themes in the thesis.

The main focus of this thesis is Auckland Music Theatre as a developing community adapting to social, economic and aesthetic changes in musical theatre. As every project must have its boundaries, this thesis will not include musical or dramaturgical analyses for any of the shows under consideration. Musical analysis of overseas musicals has been undertaken by scholars of international stature. Thus, I would be merely adding to a canon of existing work. On the other hand, the history of amateur musical theatre in the context of the development of the Auckland region is a vast and largely untapped topic.
The New Zealand musical will not be examined as it is a broad topic in its own right. However, Auckland Music Theatre has mounted a handful of New Zealand musicals during its lifespan, and those will be discussed in the context of the repertoire. The activities of professional theatre and opera companies lie outside the scope of this thesis except in so far as they overlap with the productions mounted by amateur musical societies.
CHAPTER TWO

Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter presents the research question in its conceptual framework, and sets out the course of action that was implemented to complete this project in a systematic and timely manner. The research question is: how did Auckland Music Theatre Inc. adapt to changing social, economic and aesthetic issues affecting the realm of musical theatre?

I chose a microhistorical approach after carefully considering other options, in full awareness that there is an overlap with methods such as ethnography. As John Creswell points out, however, the choice of methodology depends on the primary objectives of the study: for instance, “exploring a life is different from generating a theory or describing the behaviour of a cultural group”. My question explores how people adapt and change: it does not attempt to come to a specific truth about a unified culture, or to generate a theory. Creswell observes also that the choice of methodology is a personal one, based on what is “comfortable” for the researcher. Indeed, one cannot pursue a methodology with which one is not comfortable, because it affects the integrity of the research project.

In Small Worlds, John Walton, James F. Brooks and Christoper R. N. DeCorse, state that microhistory was a postmodern response to a growing frustration with “global perspectives and meta-narratives”. Accordingly, microhistory investigates smaller units such as families or individuals, small communities or a single event in a social context. Scholars acknowledge that microhistory is difficult to define. In the 1980s, nevertheless, “microhistory came to refer to a particular style of work rather than any codified method, a practice rather than a doctrine”.

Small Worlds presents twelve microhistories, written by a range of scholars from four disciplines - anthropology, archaeology, history and sociology - who urge for a return to narrative and detailed analysis on a small scale, rather than generalisations. The microhistories examine discrete locations, people and methods, through which both the familiarity of lived experience and the more remote influences that shaped their days can

99 Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, 64.
100 Ibid., 40.
102 Ibid.
be observed concurrently. Variations in interdisciplinary perspectives and concerns are exemplified in the range of subjects and locations.

In his study of the nineteenth-century Russian Colony Ross in northern California, Kent Lightfoot uses archaeological findings, oral traditions, and archival and census documents to explore the lives of “indigenous women and their daily experiences” with the aim of gaining a broader picture of life in the colony. His microhistorical study reveals that the Russian treatment of its Native workers within the mercantile enterprise of Ross was not as benign as is suggested by meta-narratives based on “studies of colonial policies, demographic trends, and statistics on rebellions, incarcerations, and litigation cases”. On the other hand, Linda Gordon’s study of the life of Dorothea Lange, a Great Depression-era photographer, employs “biography as microhistory”. As part of her employment in the U.S. Farm Security Administration (FSA), Lange photographed sharecroppers and migrant farm workers. She appended to the photographs, captions that gave brief individual and family histories, such as “Migrant agricultural worker’s family. Seven hungry children. Mother aged thirty-two. Father is native Californian. Nipomo, California”. By studying the technique and detail of Lange’s images, Gordon illustrates how the life and art of one woman provide insight into New Deal political culture.

Conversely, in her Ph.D. thesis Les Noces: A microhistory of the Paris 1923 production, Drue Alexandra Fergison discusses Serge Diaghilev’s ballet Les Noces, his sole creation for the 1923 Paris season. Fergison explores how “Les Noces and its reception were shaped by the cosmopolitan Russian expatriate and avant-garde circles in Paris”. Les Noces was staged midway between Diaghilev’s failed London ballet The Sleeping Princess (1922), and his promising season of new French ballets commencing in 1924. Fergison regards Les Noces as the pivotal work of a pivotal year in the history of the Ballets Russes, because it convincingly linked the old and the new. That is, Les Noces marked the end of the Ballet Russes’ Russian period and the beginning of its neo-classical one. Fergison has used both archival information and oral interview techniques.

103 Brooks, DeCorse and Walton, eds., Small Worlds, 6.
106 Ibid., 161.
107 “New Deal” was a series of economic programmes implemented in America from 1933-36.
109 Ibid.
Microhistory as a field of study has developed in Europe and America since the 1970s, led by scholars such as Giovanni Levi, Carlo Ginzburg and Georg Iggers. Levi’s definition is as follows:

Microhistory is essentially a historiographical practice whereas its theoretical references are varied and, in a sense, eclectic. The method is in fact concerned first and foremost with the actual detailed procedures which constitute the historian.⁹¹⁰

Microhistorians believe that it is better to tackle popular culture by means of qualitative techniques, rather than by quantitative methods and historical demography. Levi explains that “microhistory as a practice is essentially based on the reduction of the scale of observation, on a microscopic analysis and an intensive study of the documentary material”.⁹¹¹ The researcher focuses upon a single individual or community, and endeavours to grasp the wider issues through investigation and analysis. Levi quotes as an example the seemingly insignificant act of a person purchasing a loaf of bread that embraces the much wider system of the grain markets of the whole world.⁹¹²

In attempting to establish the differences of perspective between microhistory and interpretive anthropology, Levi claims “that the latter sees a homogeneous meaning in public signs and symbols whereas microhistory seeks to define and measure them with reference to the multiplicity of social representations they produce”.⁹¹³ This encompasses a view of a society marked by social differentiation. Levi summarises the specific function of narrative as having two characteristics in communicating with the reader:

The first is the attempt to demonstrate, by an account of solid facts, the true functioning of certain aspects of society which would be distorted by generalization and quantitative formalization used on their own . . . The second characteristic is that of incorporating into the main body of the narrative the procedures of research itself, the documentary limitations, techniques of persuasion and interpretive constructions . . . the researcher’s point of view becomes an intrinsic part of the account.⁹¹⁴

Ginzburg states that he adopted the word “microhistory” after hearing it initially from Levi. He later discovered that the American scholar George R. Stewart had first used the term in 1959.⁹¹⁵ The Cheese and the Worms, Ginzburg’s most famous work, is considered a landmark in the field of microhistory and concerns the heresy trial of Menocchio, a peasant miller, in the sixteenth century. Ginzburg argues that Menocchio’s beliefs were a normal, rather than an abnormal, representation of peasant culture and thus linked his study to a larger picture which included the influence of the Catholic Church.

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⁹¹¹ Ibid., 99.
⁹¹² Ibid., 100.
⁹¹³ Ibid., 107.
⁹¹⁴ Ibid., 109-110.
The inspiration for \textit{The Cheese and the Worms} came “from \textit{War and Peace}, from Tolstoy’s conviction that a historical phenomenon can become comprehensible only by reconstructing the activities of all of the people who participated in it”, not just an elite few.\textsuperscript{116} Thus, the head cold that Napoleon suffered before the battle of Borodino, the stationing of the troops and the lives of the most humble soldiers were all factors in the outcome of the war.

Iggers claims that the subject matter of history has shifted from social structures and processes to culture in the broad sense of everyday life.\textsuperscript{117} Consequently, history has again assumed a human face as new attention has been given to ordinary people rather than the ruling classes. Biographies and memoirs have proved significant in piecing together the history of those ordinary people, as has oral history when written records have not been available.\textsuperscript{118} This view contrasts with parallel developments in ethnographic methodology. Iggers argues that Geertz’s theory of “thick description” is problematic because “it views the subject of its study as totally different from the observer”.\textsuperscript{119} As noted previously, microhistorians believe that the observer/author is an intrinsic part of the study. Iggers observes that Geertz is not a historian, and “has little understanding for history”, quoting as an example Geertz’s famous essay \textit{Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight}.\textsuperscript{120} Here it is claimed that “the reactions of the audience at the cockfight reflect a culture, seen as a semiotic system that is both integrated and stable, forming a whole”. According to Iggers, however, Geertz does not view the culture within the structure of social processes occurring in Balinese society, nor does he consider social divides and tensions.\textsuperscript{121} Levi concurs with Iggers that “thick description” is problematic and, in referring to the \textit{Balinese Cockfight} essay, states that “cock-fighting is presented as having a single universal significance for the whole society even though the forms of wager are socially diverse”.\textsuperscript{122}

There are some points of similarity between microhistory and ethnography: the use of interviews; the author acting as a participant-observer by writing history and analysing documents/artefacts; and the interest of the author in the “natural setting” of one’s case, albeit in a historical sense. Nevertheless, there are marked differences between the two methods. The most significant one is that the microhistorical narrative brings out the

\textsuperscript{116} Ginzburg, “Microhistory: Two or Three Things that I know about It”, 24.  
\textsuperscript{117} Iggers, \textit{Historiography in the Twentieth Century}, 1.  
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 114.  
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 116.  
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 125.  
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 125.  
different threads that have an impact on a changing group, and shows how they adapt over
time. The narrative is longitudinal because it takes into account the changing contexts of
time: a “natural setting” in itself is not static but always changing. On the other hand,
historical ethnographies, although similar, come from an ethnographic base of knowledge.
My prime concern, however, is the changing historical conditions and reactions.

**Timeline for Research Project**

In order to complete the project in an orderly manner, I devised a four-point plan on
a timeline over four years from 2007 to 2011: (1) preparation; (2) the gathering of data:
textual, verbal (interviews), visual (viewing of musicals, live and DVD); aural (listening to
recordings); (3) analysis of material; (4) thesis report. At the commencement of my studies
I listed all the resources that were available: people, books, journals, newspapers, print
music, scores, librettis, programmes, musical recordings, videos, information technology,
electronic media, libraries, museums, archives, private theatrical collections, retail outlets,
and my own knowledge and experience.

Permission was granted by the University of Auckland Ethics Committee to
conduct oral interviews, based on a list of questions that I submitted together with a
consent form (Appendices 3, 4 and 5). Written consent was received from the Auckland
Musical Arts Trust that administers the assets of Auckland Music Theatre, allowing me
full access to their private archives for the purpose of this research project.

**Historical Research Techniques Used**

John Tosh and Sean Lang argue that historical awareness is based on three
principles: (1) recognising difference based on changes that have taken place over a period
of time; (2) placing events in context; and (3) understanding the historical process, thus
acknowledging the link between events over time rather than viewing them in isolation.\(^{123}\)
This was relevant to my project as Auckland Music Theatre did not materialise overnight;
rather its history is linked to past events and people. Tosh and Lang stress the importance
of shedding contemporary views in order to recognise the differences in language and
attitudes that exist between eras.\(^{124}\) In reality, this may not be possible. As an adjunct to
this they warn against the tendency to confuse respect for tradition with historical fact
because of the inherent danger of indulging in nostalgia. This is, of course, pertinent when


\(^{124}\) Ibid., 9-13.
studying official past records, as they may perpetuate myths: it reinforces the need for triangulation (cross-confirmation) of evidence, wherever possible, to ensure accuracy.

To give the research a valid foundation it seemed appropriate to combine empirical, archival and textual research with an examination of theatrical, musical and historical issues. An integral part of the research was to compare the number and type of British musicals, American musicals and European operettas performed by Auckland Music Theatre. In this regard, the archives were a valuable source of documentary evidence. Nevertheless, as Levi argues, the researcher’s point of view becomes an inherent part of the account. In this case, I have provided a particular lens through which the reader can view Auckland Music Theatre as a cultural community.

The intention had been to divide the thesis into eight historical chapters covering the period from 1841 to 2009, with each having its own topic or theme: the influence of British and American musicals, the theatrical history of Auckland from 1841 to 1918, the Auckland Music Theatre repertoire, performers, creative teams, administrators, the reception by critics and the reception by audiences. After due consideration, it was obvious that this would not produce a cohesive structure because it would be too fragmented, with some overlap.

Chronological order, therefore, seemed the most methodical and apposite approach. In the interests of consistency, I decided initially to use the same format for each of the seven historical chapters, but this proved unrealistic because of the diversity of the material. It was difficult to organise an identical chapter structure for the pre-1919 and post-1919 period. As stated in chapter one, musical theatre as we know it in 2009 did not exist in the early decades of colonial Auckland. Therefore, it was a matter of ascertaining which types of entertainment may have existed from 1841 onwards.

Chapter three describes an assortment of people who established a range of musical and theatre groups in Auckland, but did not necessarily have a common history. I was able to supplement the information that was available in local newspapers with some material from written sources, as noted in chapter one. On the other hand, chapter four documents the repertoire and personalities of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club, and the relationship with other societies. The chapter is based on information that was selected from local newspapers of the time. This seemed the most pragmatic option: it was not possible to write an accurate history based on the policies adopted by the Auckland Amateur Opera Club, or the decisions made, because of the lack of primary sources.

Auckland Music Theatre, however, is the main focus of the thesis. By New Zealand standards, the ninety-year history of the society is a long one. As noted in chapter one, I
decided, therefore, to devote chapters five to nine to Auckland Music Theatre. This gave me the opportunity to investigate the historical particularities of the case. The intention was to provide a unified structure that reflected the evolution of musical theatre, with reference to the West End and Broadway, in the context of the development of the Auckland region.

After reading and analysing the data that was available, I realised that certain issues re-emerged over the decades: the quest for increasingly higher standards of production although the performers were unpaid amateurs, the relationship between theatrical amateurs and professionals, the loyalty of members, the sense of community identity, the constraints of copyright, the influence of the media, and the evolving social tone of Auckland society. Therefore, in order to provide continuity, those issues were used as a narrative thread, in conjunction with the choice of repertoire.

**Sources of Data**

The Auckland Music Theatre archives were the most important primary source for my research. Other significant sources included the Alexander Turnbull Library, Auckland City Library archives, the University of Auckland Libraries, Auckland Museum Library, private collections and oral interviews. Textbooks, newspapers, journals and musical recordings were the secondary sources.

**Auckland Music Theatre Archives**

Many of the early records of Auckland Music Theatre were destroyed in March 1973 by a flood at the premises in Princes Street. Nevertheless, there is a considerable, if incomplete, collection of minutes of meetings, annual reports, financial accounts, correspondence, production records, programmes, photographs, posters, press clippings and theatrical reviews. The only minutes of meetings and annual reports which are available in the archives are those from 1962 to 1969, 1973 to 2001 and 2004 to 2009. Financial records from 1967 to 2000 are on file. Through painstaking research many of the missing items were located from other sources such as libraries and private collections. The sheer volume of physical objects such as historical documents and artefacts was overwhelming, but those items form an essential aspect of the microhistorical record.

Documents and photographs contained in the archives aided the reconstruction of the history of the society based on factual information, rather than retrospective

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\textsuperscript{125} Committee minutes, 9 April 1973.
assumptions. History, nevertheless, is more than just the written word. The changing styles of the programmes, photographs and other documents exude a tangible sense of atmosphere, tradition and a sense of community identity. The photographs range from sepia prints, to black and white and coloured ones. As Linda Gordon found in her study of the photographer Dorothea Lange, the technique and detail of photographs can provide much insight.\footnote{Gordon in Brooks, DeCorse and Walton, eds., \textit{Small Worlds}, 146.} Leaving aside the nostalgia factor, the mere act of examining the various photographs and programmes of yesteryear increased my awareness of the cultural heritage of Auckland Music Theatre. Moreover, the quality of the material emphasises the high standard that has been a hallmark of the society. As New Zealand has a very short history compared with many other parts of the world, the fact that many of the photographs and programmes were printed up to nine decades ago added to their interest. It reinforces that the ninety-year legacy of Auckland Music Theatre is an important one.

\textit{Auckland Museum Library}

I was able to trace in the Auckland Museum Library a selection of minutes of meetings, annual reports and financial records of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society from 1928 to 1947. The information is neatly bound within hard covers in five volumes: volume 1 from 30 August 1928 to 6 April 1932; volume 2 from 21 April 1932 to 30 August 1934; volume 3 from 4 April 1935 to 22 July 1938; volume 4 from 8 August 1938 to 5 August 1943, but with a gap from 11 June 1942 to 10 February 1943; and volume 5 from 12 August 1943 to 30 January 1947.

The minutes from 1928 to 1931 are meticulously handwritten in copperplate while the financial records and annual reports are typed. From 1932, all records were typed. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the records from 1928 to the early 1960s are very detailed, compared with subsequent information. This may be due to the fact that from 1928 until the early 1960s a paid managing secretary was employed to record the minutes. After the early 1960s, the position of secretary was undertaken by volunteers who performed the role as a goodwill gesture with no financial reward. Moreover, the author is aware that over the past twenty years in particular, the changing privacy laws and the requirement to be politically correct in New Zealand may have affected the amount of detail which was included in the minutes. The changing format of the minutes and the information therein show how the society adapted over time to meet the necessary demands.
All the minutes of meeting and annual reports are a valuable source in that they provide a written record of contemporaneous events. However, the minutes from 1928 to 1947 are an especially important source of information, because most of the people who were involved with the society during that period have passed away. The late Mr Vivian Jacobs, who was interviewed in the course of research for this thesis, could remember as a child seeing *Tutankhamen* in the 1920s. However, he did not join the society until 1936.

*Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington*

The annual reports of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society from 1951 to 1961 are located at the Alexander Turnbull Library. As the minutes for that period appear to have been lost, the annual reports are a useful source for filling in historical gaps. They provide a summary of the state of the society in terms of finances, and choice of repertoire. Indeed, the available annual reports over the decades tend to be relatively balanced in outlook: very rarely do they present an unrealistically cheerful or a despondent point of view. However, a common thread is an entreaty by the various chairpersons that members should support the society unconditionally, because this is vital to its survival. With few exceptions, the wording of the reports shows a high standard of literacy. Arguably, therefore, it reveals that the chairpersons, generally, are well-educated and wish to convey a professional image, as well as reinforcing their pride in the society.

Additional information retrieved from the Alexander Turnbull Library includes four programmes from musicals staged by the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society: *The Geisha* (1920), *A Country Girl* (1921) and *Our Miss Gibbs* (1922), donated by “M. Mitchell” in 1990; and *A Greek Slave* (1931), which was part of the John Gordon Programme Collection. Mitchell was a member of the inaugural Auckland Amateur Operatic Society committee, and Gordon performed in several of the productions. I placed copies of those programmes in the files of Auckland Music Theatre. One of my goals had been to build up a complete set of programmes, because their changing format reflects the history of the society in line with the changing times.

The Alexander Turnbull Library has available also a set of nine compact discs, recorded in three volumes of three discs each, entitled “Music from the New York Stage 1890-1917”.

127 Music from the New York Stage, 1890-1917. Sussex: Pavilion Records Ltd.
volumes of two discs each, entitled “Broadway through the Gramophone” featuring musicals performed on the New York stage from 1844 to 1929.\textsuperscript{128} The volumes are divided into eras but with a descriptive heading: vol. 1 (two discs) “New York in European Footsteps” 1844 to 1909; vol. 2 (two discs) “Broadway prior to World War I”, 1909-1914; vol. 3 (two discs) “The Musical Stage in the War Years”, 1914-1920; and vol. 4 (two discs) “From the Great War to the Talkies”, 1920-1929. As recordings of musicals written before 1900 can be difficult to locate, those discs proved an important resource. Listening to excerpts from the shows provided valuable insight into the style of music of the period, the singing techniques and the orchestrations.

\textit{Auckland City Library Archives}

The Special Collections Division of the Auckland City Library holds press clippings from the \textit{New Zealand Herald} as well as the now defunct \textit{Freeman’s Journal}, the \textit{Observer}, the \textit{Auckland Star}, the \textit{Weekly News}, and the \textit{New Zealand National Sporting and Dramatic Review}. In addition, the Auckland City Library Ephemera and Auckland Scrap Book Collections contains items of historical value that included the Freida Dickens Collection of theatre programmes, press clippings and photographs of visiting performers dating back to 1912. According to a newspaper article (\textit{New Zealand Herald}, 22 May 1976), Dickens was a pianist who had “satisfied her love for theatre life by playing the piano at Saturday afternoon matinees in two city theatres before she joined Lewis Eady’s in 1931”, where she worked for twenty-eight years. This was followed by seventeen years at His Majesty’s Theatre box office until 1976, when she retired at the age of seventy-five. Dickens’ dedication to theatre exemplifies the type of commitment that is the hallmark of loyal members of amateur theatre. In line with a microhistorical study, it also illustrates the efforts of an ordinary person whose contribution may have seemed insignificant at the time but, in retrospect, proved important in the history of amateur musical theatre.

The Auckland City Library archives have on file the original Document of Sale for the premises at 33 Grafton Road from the College Rifles Club to the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society on 9 June 1924.\textsuperscript{129} As the Grafton Road Hall was the first headquarters of the society, this information was one of the more exciting discoveries: no one in the present day was aware that the Hall had been purchased from the College Rifles Club.

\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Broadway through the Gramophone, 1844-1929}. Sussex: Pavilion Records Ltd.

\textsuperscript{129} The \textit{Show Boat} (1969) programme, 2, confirms that the proceeds from \textit{Tutankhamen} (1923, 1924) were used for the deposit to purchase the Grafton Road premises.
Letters of complaint from Mr Samuel Jacobs to the mayor and city councillors, concerning disreputable behaviour at social functions held at the Grafton Road Hall, are located in the same file as the Document of Sale. Jacobs owned a property next door to 33 Grafton Road. The wording and tone of Jacobs’ letters reinforces the importance of Victorian respectability as late as 1927 and provides some insight into the mentality of early twentieth-century Aucklanders and the customs of the era. Jacobs was a businessman, but his letters are grammatically incorrect, with several spelling errors. This suggests, perhaps, that he was a self-made man of working-class stock, and may have been a churchgoer as he resented the fact there were activities in the Hall on Sundays. He may have been also a member of the temperance movement, because he stressed the evils of drinking alcohol. However, these are mere assumptions. Jacobs’ letters are discussed in more detail in chapter six.

**Newspapers and Journals**

For the period from 1841 to 1918, newspapers and journals are a very useful secondary source of information with regard to theatrical activities. Using only newspaper articles on which to base a history was not ideal, but in many cases those were the only available source. The articles make fascinating reading in regard to politics, economics, social events and theatrical activities. Many of the articles are amusing because of their pompous tone and opinionated content. Consequently, although the newspaper articles are biased by the views of the authors, they provide a commentary which reflects the social and political attitudes of the era.

The biases in themselves are illuminating. Two rival newspapers that operated in Auckland in the early decades are a case in point: the *Southern Cross* and the *New-Zealander* reflected significant differences in outlook. The *Southern Cross* revealed an economic, social and political bent that tended to support European land owners while the *New-Zealander* championed the working class. For instance, a newspaper review of the Total Abstinence Society Anniversary Tea Party (*New-Zealander*, 18 July 1846) that was held at the Mechanics’ Institute wholeheartedly supported the working class while criticising the upper classes of Auckland:

> The utmost harmony and good feeling prevailed throughout the evening, and the happy countenances of the assembled guests were indicative of the pleasure and enjoyment they experienced. . . . Messrs. Griffin, and Caleb Robinson each entertained the company by singing in

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130 Auckland Newspaper Press, [http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc02Cyc1-tl-body_1-dl-d26.html](http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc02Cyc1-tl-body_1-dl-d26.html) (accessed 10 June 2009). Initially the *Southern Cross* (1843-76) was owned by a group of merchants, and the *New-Zealander* (1845-66) by Mr John Williamson. The newspapers changed hands several times.
turn a temperance song, adapted to well known melodies. . . . It is a humiliating sign of the
degeneracy of feeling which prevails among the higher orders of the present day, when we see them
stand aloof from these praiseworthy efforts of the humbler classes to supplant the vicious excesses of
intemperate revelry by the introduction of the sober pleasures of a rational conviviality.

The review provides an interesting insight into the outlook of some nineteenth-century
Aucklanders.

Newspapers featured a wide variety of advertisements for auditions, entertainment
and critiques of theatrical performances that illuminated the customs and expectations of
the era. The main sources are the *New-Zealander*, the *Southern Cross*, the *Observer*, the
*NZ Herald*, the *Auckland Star* and the *New Zealand National Sporting and
Dramatic Review*. The *Triad*, a fashionable literary journal, which operated from 1893 to
c.1929, provided musical critiques but there was little information in regard to Auckland.
It was, therefore, of limited assistance.

From 1919 into the 1980s, the *NZ Herald*, the *Auckland Star*, local
suburban newspapers, and weekly journals such as the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*
provided extensive coverage of amateur theatrical activities. Compared with previous
decades, the articles tend to be less pompous in tone. Newspaper articles reveal the public
face of Auckland Music Theatre as it adapted to the changing historical conditions.
However, from the early 1990s, newspapers ceased their reviews of amateur shows.
Occasionally, if a society advertised its shows extensively, the newspapers would send a
reviewer to the opening night. The cost of advertising, nevertheless, became prohibitive.
Nowadays, Auckland Music Theatre is making increasing use of its website and social
media such as facebook, to advertise shows and place audition notices.

**Personal Collections**

In addition to my own memorabilia, vocal scores, libretti and musical recordings,
several friends and acquaintances permitted me to peruse and copy press clippings,
photographs and programmes from their own collections: Garth Clark, Doreen and Ken
Donnell, John Fausett, Ian Gardiner, Vivian Jacobs, Neil Jenkins, Margo Knightbridge,
Brian O’Connor, Roland and Yvonne Everard, Sandra Sewell, Susan Story, Brian White
and Maggie Wright.

The importance of photographs has been addressed elsewhere in this chapter.
Nevertheless, the photographs in personal collections provide a different focus in that they
feature the owners and reflect the lives of every day people. Consequently, the
photographs serve a dual purpose in that they reveal the career of the owner, as well as the
history of the society. These bridged a gap in the research, because the Auckland Music
Theatre archives do not have a complete set of photographs. As I decided to use a selection of photographs to illustrate the changing face of the repertoire and the technology, the private collections proved a useful adjunct to other sources.

**Oral Interviews**

There has been little formal academic documentation of amateur musical theatre in the Auckland region. Therefore, I considered it essential to interview people who have been, or are, at the forefront of the industry as they were a good primary source, adding richness of detail coupled with empirical experience. I identified three broad categories of people to interview: (1) performers (singers, actors, dancers); (2) production/creative team (directors, musical directors, choreographers, set designers, properties designers, costume/wardrobe/wig designers, make-up artists, lighting technicians, sound technicians); (3) administrators (committee members, front of house, sales and marketing). In consultation with my main university supervisor at the time, it was decided to interview a maximum of twenty-four people.

In the interests of consistency, each participant was asked the same twenty questions, which were carefully designed to reflect the historical and cultural development of amateur musical theatre in the Auckland region. Asking each interviewee the same questions was one way of cross-checking facts, as well as testing the accuracy of claims made. It was important also to analyse how precisely the recollections of the interviewees confirmed or negated the information in the minutes of Auckland Music Theatre. In his microhistorical study of the indigenous women in Russian Colony Ross, Kent Lightfoot does stress the importance of oral interviews, because he maintains that official documents do not always provide the full picture. In the case of Colony Ross, the writers of the official documents had deliberately filtered out the “destructive consequences of colonial entanglements”, for instance.131 As a researcher but an insider, I was able to extract information that may not have been gained by an outsider, as there was a degree of trust because of my association with the society over more than forty years.

**Procedures/Data Collection**

Collecting data proved a huge task. I decided to investigate every possible avenue. This included speaking with a range of people, reading various textbooks, searching the internet, and visiting libraries and the museum in Auckland. I was fortunate enough to

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131 Lightfoot in Brooks, DeCorse and Walton, eds., *Small Worlds*, 269.
attend a musical theatre conference at the City University of New York in 2008 and have the privilege of listening to, and meeting, many renowned scholars from various parts of the world. In addition, I was able to view several Broadway productions and absorb the vibrant atmosphere, which is very different from that of Auckland.

**Auckland Music Theatre Archives**

In early 2006, before submitting my research proposal to the University of Auckland School of Music, I contacted the committee of Auckland Music Theatre and received permission to proceed with my project. Consequently, I was given access to the archives of the society, which were located in the present working theatre, Westpoint Performing Arts Centre, 40 Meola Road, Western Springs. I also received written permission dated 2 April 2009, in regard to the use of copyright material, from the Auckland Musical Arts Trust which controls the assets of the society.

My research proposal was accepted by the University of Auckland in February 2007. Over a period of three days in June 2007, with the help of Garth Clark, a committee member of Auckland Music Theatre, I carefully packed the documents into twenty-five boxes. Permission had been received from the Auckland Musical Arts Trust to transport the documents to my home.

**Libraries**

I visited the Auckland Museum Library for one day per week over a period of six months during 2008 to read the minutes, annual reports and financial records of the society. To ensure the most efficient use of time I rang the Auckland Museum Library in advance to ensure that the records, which were in storage, would be available. In an effort to provide as broad a base as possible for my research, the first step was to read through all the information to gain an overall picture. The second step was to note the points that could be of interest in regard to choice of repertoire, committee members, performers and technical crews. The third step was to organise for the staff to photocopy the relevant information. The fourth step was to catalogue, file and summarise the material at my home.

Over a period of two years from May 2007 to June 2009 I visited the Auckland City Library for one day per week, because many of the relevant newspapers were available only on microfiche *in situ*. I searched the microfiche files for audition notices, show critiques, photographs and publicity material relating to amateur musical theatre. It was necessary to book a microfiche in advance as library regulations permit only one hour at a
sitting because of the shortage of equipment. Fortuitously, some newspapers, notably the *Southern Cross*, the *New-Zealander* and the *Observer*, were available online through the Alexander Turnbull Library. Time-wise that was a much more efficient process, because the resource could be accessed from home at any time.

**Oral Interviews**

The rules stated that an interview consent form should be signed by the interviewees prior to the interview and, if they wished to have their name suppressed, a pseudonym could be substituted. All the interviewees chose to use their own names. A recording device could be used during the interview, subject to the interviewee’s approval. After the interview was transcribed it was to be sent to the interviewee for verification of the information. If an interviewee so desired, they could have a copy of the interview tape as a historical record. If at any time the interviewee wished to withdraw from the interview process, their wishes were to be respected. No one withdrew from the project. According to the regulations, the consent forms were to be lodged with the University of Auckland at the completion of the thesis, whereas the tapes were to be kept in a secure place for a period of six years.

I listed fifty names of prospective interviewees. After studying the list, I telephoned twenty-four people of various ages that I believed would provide the most valuable historical information for the project. The interviewees, who had performed a broad range of activities within theatre, were selected carefully with the aim of providing a balanced approach.

Ten women and fourteen men, ranging in age from forty to ninety-three, were interviewed: Robert Alderton, Bill Brinsley, Anthony Carroll, Garth Clark, Doreen Donnell, Ray Dormer, Roland Everard, John Fausett, Derek Firth, Ian Gardiner, Roger Hall, Val Hemphill, Vivian Jacobs, Bill Leathwick, Julia Leathwick, Janice Mackay, Louise Malloy, Brian O’Connor, Yvonne Phillips-Everard, Stephen Rowe, Sandra Sewell, Susan Story, Maggie Wright and Doreen Yalland. It is noteworthy that Susan Story is the daughter of the late Doreen Yalland; Julia Leathwick is the daughter of Bill Leathwick; and Yvonne Phillips-Everard and the late Roland Everard were husband and wife. Moreover, the husband of Doreen Donnell is a performer, as is the wife of Bill Leathwick.

The interviews took place between 26 April 2007 and 8 October 2008 at a variety of venues: the home of the interviewee, my home, or the Westpoint Performing Arts Centre. Three interviews were conducted by telephone as the people were resident in Australia: Ray Dormer, Roland Everard and Yvonne Phillips-Everard. The interviews
varied in length from two to three hours. The following general background information was provided by the interviewees:

- eleven came from second- or third-generation theatre families, and nine had started performing or learning a musical instrument by the time they were eight years old;
- twenty were born in New Zealand, but only thirteen were born in Auckland;
- all had an English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh heritage to a greater or lesser degree;
- three were born in England and resided in Auckland;
- one was born in Australia, moved to Auckland in 1963, and returned to Sydney in 1965 with her New Zealand husband, to perform in professional theatre; they came back to Auckland in 1974 and returned to Queensland in 1997;
- one New Zealand-born interviewee moved to Sydney in 1978, and continued to direct shows for amateur theatre;
- all interviewees are, or were, involved with both professional and amateur theatre and had come through the amateur performing ranks;
- fourteen have been able to make a fulltime career in theatre in New Zealand, for varying periods;
- many have supplemented their professional theatre careers by teaching subjects such as dance, drama, singing, lighting and sound;
- unlike the majority of the interviewees Roger Hall became a playwright, which was always his chosen path;
- all but two had been performers prior to undertaking other responsibilities such as directing, conducting, choreography, technical tasks and committee work;
- Robert Alderton and Vivian Jacobs had received the Queen’s medal for services to theatre, while Bill Leathwick received a medal for services to Broadcasting;

All the interviewees considered that their amateur theatrical activities were, and always had been, much more than a hobby: becoming involved with musical theatre had enhanced their life by offering the opportunity to:

- engage socially and forge long-lasting friendships with people who had similar interests and a common purpose, which engendered a sense of identity and belonging;
- work with a spouse, partner and/or children and parents;
- hone performing, creative, technical, administrative and communication skills;
- engage in professional theatre both at home and abroad.
The interviewees all agreed that the biggest change which had occurred in the last thirty years in theatre was in technology. They claimed that the use of microphones had caused the standard of singing to deteriorate, because there was too much reliance on technology instead of technique. All commented that the style of singing in musical theatre was now closer to pop music than to operetta, but many of the roles such as Christine in *Phantom of the Opera* required a very wide range. Moreover, stage sets had become visually more appealing. There had been many changes backstage, not the least of which was that more women were now involved. This was due, largely, to the diminution in manual labour because of hydraulics, mechanisation and automation.

It was agreed that older-style shows normally had a much larger chorus than did more modern shows. However, when the interviewees were asked whether they had a preference for American or British musicals, the answers were diverse. Six preferred American musicals, while three preferred British musicals. Six had no preference, but one person qualified his answer by saying that Sondheim, an American, was his favourite composer. Another commented that while he preferred American musicals, he also liked the works of Andrew Lloyd Webber. One person preferred British musicals as well as early American ones such as *Oklahoma!* Another felt that American musicals were more spectacular than the British ones. Six pointed out that with the advent of the megamusical and its spectacular staging, it was difficult to tell the style of musicals apart.

Overall, the most thought-provoking replies were in answer to the question whether more New Zealand musicals, namely, ones that were written by local people and which reflected our heritage, should be performed. Not one person believed that a New Zealand musical should be performed merely because it had been written locally. Ten people stated that New Zealand musicals should be performed only if they were well written, with a good score and script. One person considered that New Zealand did not have sufficient depth of history to warrant the writing of a musical, while another said he did not feel strongly enough about his New Zealand heritage. Two interviewees considered that it would be risky financially as there were no famous New Zealand musicals. Two others observed that while New Zealand musicals should be performed, it would be difficult to attract an audience.

One said that as New Zealanders had such a mixed heritage, it would be difficult to write a musical that appealed to the masses. Another contended that the great New Zealand musical had not yet been written while yet another observed that New Zealanders still suffered from the “colonial cringe”, which meant they were embarrassed by home-grown productions. One person stated that Auckland had yet to discover an Andrew Lloyd
Webber, but another was adamant that Roger Hall, New Zealand’s most famous playwright was writing high-quality plays and musicals of an international standard. Generally, the interviewees found it difficult to define a New Zealand heritage because of the multicultural nature of the population. Most felt that British and American musical theatre was, in fact, their heritage. When asked to name their favourite musical, most interviewees chose one in which they had starred or directed successfully. One said his favourite musical was the one he was directing at any given time.

In alphabetical order, “favourite” musicals nominated by the interviewees were: A Little Night Music, Beauty and the Beast, Big River, Camelot, Carmen, Die Fledermaus/Pink Champagne, Evita, Fiddler on the Roof, Follies, 42nd Street, Irma La Douce, Jesus Christ Superstar, Kiss Me Kate, La Cage aux Folles, Les Misérables, Man of La Mancha, Oklahoma!, On a Clear Day, Pippin, Puccini operas, The Sound of Music, The Merry Widow and The Producers.

American musicals were the most popular choice, with fourteen being named. Only two British musicals were nominated: Evita and Jesus Christ Superstar, both composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber. Other favourites were European musicals and operas. Ten of the musicals named by the interviewees have been staged by Auckland Music Theatre. It had been my intention to include the interviews as a second volume attached to this thesis, but it was not permitted by the university regulations. The interviews, nevertheless, are used in this thesis as points of reference in the history of Auckland Music Theatre.

**Data Analysis and Verification**

There are various pathways that may be followed in the quest to document a history. Pivotal to this is my research question, which has informed my data analysis and interpretation: it provided a focal point as I examined the way in which the society adapted to changing historical circumstances. It was fitting to concentrate on the repertoire chosen over the decades because that reflected the changing times, both socially and economically. To an extent, however, the repertoire of Auckland Music Theatre presented a problem: the exact content of its revues, concerts and ballets was often not listed. Consequently, it proved impossible to analyse accurately the national origin. Although one could assume from the title of revues such as Palace of Varieties and Music Hall that the content was British, the songs could have been drawn from a variety of sources. The ballet season programmes also did not list all the items. Only the programmes of musicals and plays provided details as to national origin and content.
Ultimately, I decided to categorise all the productions of Auckland Music Theatre into the following genres: musicals, revues/concerts, plays and ballets. However, I classified only the musicals and plays according to national origin. The relevant chapters of this thesis include the title of the production, the year it was performed by Auckland Music Theatre, the surnames of the composers, lyricists and author where relevant and the country of national origin. However, for reference purposes, Appendix 6 provides a detailed index of composers, lyricists, playwrights and authors.

The documents of Auckland Music Theatre were in considerable disarray. Consequently, I spent twelve months cataloguing and filing the minutes, annual reports, financial records and production reports in chronological order. In addition, I created spreadsheets that noted the names and dates of productions, the names of committee members, performers, creative teams and technical crews. I also analysed and summarised the minutes, financial and annual reports, noting defining moments in the history of the society, memorable events, and general trends. This was a crucial part of the preparation before commencing the writing process. Although it was a long and painstaking journey, it provided a good basis for a microhistory.

In deciding which visual images should be included in the thesis, I was aware that copyright could be an issue. For instance, with the programmes that had been printed within the last fifty years, copyright holders reserve the right to approve the programmes for shows and the rights expire at the end of the season. Accordingly, to illustrate how theatre has evolved, I decided to include photographs that showed the various theatres used by Auckland Music Theatre, unusually elaborate costumes or makeup and the changes in technology.

Most of the interviewees had programmes, posters, press clippings and photographs readily available and, in some cases, neatly catalogued. This made the task of checking dates and other relevant information less laborious than might otherwise have been the case. Interviewees, too, were very aware that their comments could be included in the thesis, and were careful to impart information objectively.

Newspaper sources, while valuable, do present a challenge: it was obvious from the letters written by the general public to the editor, for instance, that the writers not infrequently used newspapers as a public forum to promote their own views. The two main Auckland newspapers of their era, the *New-Zealander* and the *Southern Cross*, which have been used as important reference points in this thesis, were not always in accord. For example, in October 1848 there was some hostility between the two newspapers in regard to the perceived morality, or otherwise, of an amateur theatre
society. At another point, when there was some rivalry between the Auckland Amateur Opera Club and the Auckland Choral Society, the newspapers expressed opposing views. Therefore, the newspaper articles have been used in full awareness of those biases. However, even minutes of meetings, which purportedly record events objectively, are written from the perspective of the author.

**Conclusion**

A study of all the above sources highlighted the necessity to continue to explore, analyse and investigate all avenues of enquiry, even when writing the final draft. The ten-chapter format of this thesis, with eight chapters devoted to the development of amateur musical theatre in the Auckland region using the repertoire as the main thread, seemed the most logical option based on the research conducted. It also accorded with a microhistorical approach.
CHAPTER THREE

Transplanting Theatrical Traditions:
An Overview of Amateur Musical and Theatrical Societies in Auckland 1841 to 1882

Establishing a Stage in Colonial Auckland

As with any musical production one must set the scene, which, in this historical outline, is Auckland, capital of colonial New Zealand in 1841, with a European population of 1,835 consisting mainly of migrants from the British Isles and New South Wales. Musical theatre, as we know it in 2009, did not exist in 1841. However, English-speaking theatre and entertainment became an integral part of the cultural life almost immediately and helped to shape the development of the Auckland region. Thus, the claim by Jan Harris that Aucklanders were “more concerned with commerce than culture” is debatable.

The early advent of colonial theatre was not an unprecedented phenomenon: John Lowerson explains that British migrants usually brought with them music and theatre as “largely an extension of the national domestic memory” in an effort to retain the bond with their homeland. Mrs Felton Mathew, wife of the first surveyor-general of Auckland, for instance, wrote in her diary in 1841 that a Philharmonic Society had been founded by amateur musicians who met monthly either at each other’s houses or at Wood’s Hotel. In contrast, from 1841 less respectable hotels offered a new type of entertainment instigated by a migrant named David Osborne, a self-styled Scottish Professor of Elocution who was the first in Auckland to mount a public theatrical production. The entertainment was based on the type of attractions presented in

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132 Noted in chapter one, page five of this thesis. The Evening Post, 25 September 1913, cites that in 1841, of the 1238 male and 597 female inhabitants 14 (including one infant) lived at Government House, while the “old lock-up at the corner of Queen-street and Victoria-street” [sic] housed 12 male prisoners.

133 Harris, *Sweet Villa of Highwic: the Story of Highwic and the Buckland Family*, 66. English-born Alfred Buckland, a prominent businessman, was the owner of Highwic which is now under the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. Anne Buckland, one of his daughters, became a notable singer and eventually married Charles Chambers. This husband and wife team became stalwarts of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club from the 1880s.


135 Platts, *The Lively Capital: Auckland, 1840-1865*, 81. As there were no theatres in Auckland at the time, some of the higher-class hotels such as Wood’s and Hart’s offered special facilities known as long rooms which could be hired for meetings, balls and other entertainment.

London’s minor theatres for the working classes: a mixture of farces, melodramas, dances, and songs that varied from those of folk origins to the comical and the bawdy.\(^{137}\) The genre was similar to both British and American variety theatre.

However, the Mechanics’ Institute, which was established in 1842, offered education in the arts, sciences and technical subjects as a wholesome alternative to the drinking and gambling pursuits provided by hotels. The Mechanics’ Institute followed the Scottish educational model incorporated in Glasgow in 1823, and later established in England. Debating, lectures in astronomy, instrumental tuition and vocal classes based on British folksongs and glees were organised at the institute.\(^{138}\)

From 1848, the British regiments which arrived in Auckland brought their bands and amateur operatics, and tended to become part of an elite social circle. The wives of the military, too, sometimes performed at exclusive theatrical gatherings that were organised by the families of government officials in private homes. Aucklanders who were not part of the elite circle looked elsewhere for amusement, normally at local hotels that catered for men only. Working-class women, who in this era were usually employed as domestics or in raising families, had extremely limited social opportunities.

The Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society and Military Theatre were established in 1848 and their productions, too, adopted a similar format to that of the minor theatres in London. Unlike Osborne, however, the founders of the societies were government employees, wealthy merchants or military personnel, and were thus perceived as socially acceptable.\(^{139}\) Many were capable amateur performers who participated in a range of musical and theatrical groups. The contribution of professional actors such as George Buckingham and Mrs Foley also was substantial.

This chapter will show how the talents and efforts of many persons, including amateur and professional actors and musicians, laid the foundation for an amateur musical

\(^{137}\) Mander and Mitchenson, *Musical Comedy*, 10. From 1737, theatres in England were placed under the direct authority of the Lord Chamberlain who introduced censorship and forbade the performance of legitimate drama, meaning the continuous spoken word as dialogue. The political satires written and produced by Henry Fielding at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket from 1720 were the catalyst, as they had offended both royalty and government. The 1843 Licensing Act lessened the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain and the 1737 law. This resulted in a division between the upmarket West End theatres which continued to present classical opera and similar entertainment, while the minor theatres mounted farce, melodrama, burlesque, music hall and eventually comic opera. Legitimate theatre was prohibited in premises which were licensed for musical entertainment.

\(^{138}\) *Auckland Standard*, 11 August 1842. The institute was founded at a meeting chaired by Charles Brewer, a lawyer. The committee comprised merchants, doctors and government officials and only one “mechanic”, a builder.

\(^{139}\) While New Zealand tends to regard itself as an egalitarian society, which does not have the same stratified working, middle and upper class as England and Europe, it is not entirely classless. New Zealand class structure is sometimes compared with that of America, but, equally, it could be compared with that of Australia and other countries. As cited in Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, 4.
theatre movement in the Auckland region. In addition, the chapter will explore the British influence in both music and social tone, and the gradual incursion of American music into the repertoire.

**Social Backdrop**

William Swainson, Attorney-General for New Zealand from 1841 to 1856, claimed that socially “Auckland, in many respects, resembles an English watering-place”, as not only was the population largely transient but also the town lacked the amenities of more developed centres. He explained that the lifestyle was less formal than in England because there was not a landed gentry or an aristocracy with established traditions in the European manner. Swainson acknowledged that the Auckland government officials and military did have their own elite social circle.

In the Auckland colonial setting, wealth added to one’s consequence. Therefore, European land owners and the more prosperous merchants were sometimes invited into the elite social circle. This was unlike England, where the acquisition of wealth did not necessarily give one an entrée into polite society. The fact that there was an exclusive circle in Auckland was confirmed by Mrs Felton Mathew. After attending several high-profile weddings held in 1841, she wrote to a friend that “all who had the entrée had been invited to these weddings held in Government House”. She also wrote of social gatherings in private homes where the hostess played the piano while the guests sang.

Entertainment in the 1840s and 1850s, according to Swainson, consisted of concerts, regular tea meetings and periodic state balls. The main attraction during the summer months was the regimental band that played weekly for two hours on the lawn of government house, Princes Street. The programme included music from the operas of Bellini, Mozart, Donizetti, Weber, Verdi and Gounod, which reflected the repertoire of opera houses in London. Consequently, the regimental band concerts provided a venue where people could listen to contemporary music in a fashionable setting.

Swainson noted the popularity of the concerts given by the Auckland Choral Society that was formed in 1855. Choral societies were, of course, rooted very firmly in English tradition. However, Swainson made no mention of the amateur theatrical societies that had been established in the previous decade. It may be that Swainson, as a staunch

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140 Swainson, *New Zealand and its Colonization*, 228. Brighton, for example, was a popular watering place in England which was frequented by the gentry during the hot summer months.

141 Platts, *The Lively Capital: Auckland, 1840-1865*, 34.

supporter of the Church of England, preferred to ignore the existence of those societies because of the lack of respectability, as noted. However, contemporary local newspapers offer an interesting insight into the social structure of an embryonic Auckland, and provide ample evidence that various types of public entertainment, including theatre, formed part of the early cultural life of the city.

The newspapers did not always review theatrical performances as there were matters of more pressing concern, such as the land wars between Maori and the British troops to the north and south of Auckland. Nevertheless, when amateur performers were reviewed in this era they were not judged harshly, but rather their contribution to the cultural life of Auckland was praised. Generally, theatre was perceived as a welcome relief from the anxieties and monotony of colonial life in a frontier country. All the same, there was some resistance from certain religious factions, as was evidenced by correspondence to the newspapers.

David Osborne and Minor Theatre Entertainment

The first public theatrical production in Auckland, staged by David Osborne, has been well documented by Downes. Nevertheless, because it was a landmark event in the cultural history of Auckland, it is appropriate to include it here. Osborne, a migrant from the British Isles, sometimes referred to himself as “professor”. This term had gained currency in England towards the end of the eighteenth century to identify a professional musician. Osborne mounted his initial production in Auckland on 13 November 1841 at the Blue Bell Inn, a public house located in Lower Queen Street close to the business district. This was a less respectable venue than Wood’s Hotel and frequented only by men. It is unclear whether the performers were professionals, amateurs or a mixture. According to Downes, the initial performance of “popular songs and recitations”, suitable only for an all-male audience, was not well-attended.

To attract a wider audience, Osborne staged his next production eleven days later at the Albert Theatre in the Hart’s Exchange Coffee House and Family Hotel. The playbill stated that “by permission of His Excellency the Governor” a “new Extravaganza” called The Lawyer Outwitted (London, 1811) would be presented, followed by “a Musical Melange” with a “full Orchestra”. The extravaganza cast included three men, Messrs Osborne, Fangle and Taffey, and one woman, Mrs Wilson. The musical melange consisted

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143 Downes, Shadows on the Stage, 10.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid., 11. As Downes states, the “orchestra” may have been a piano with violin and cornet.
of five items: “Rule Britannia” and “God Save the Queen”, played by “the Band”; two comic songs by Osborne, “Larry Rooney and the Monkey” and “Katty Mooney”; and a “Hornpipe” danced by Mr Gellick.

Given that New Zealand was a British colony, it is not surprising that Osborne’s production was a long distance extension of the entertainment offered in minor London theatres, and subject to the same regulations. Although the continuous spoken word was banned on stage, plays which incorporated five musical items into each act or used a musical accompaniment could be staged under a Burletta Licence. Osborne continued to mount productions sporadically until 1843. An advertisement inserted in the local newspaper (Southern Cross, 3 June 1843) shows the programme offered (figure 2).

Osborne was obviously endeavouring to attract the elite society of Auckland by staging his entertainment in a private setting, and including a child performer. Despite his attempts to present a respectable image, nevertheless, Osborne’s licence was suspended on the order of the police magistrate because of the questionable moral standard of his past theatrical activities. Subsequently, Osborne vanished. However, for some time, both amateur and professional theatre in Auckland would continue to present a similar pattern of entertainment to that offered by Osborne.

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146 As New Zealand struggled to establish theatrical traditions, a glance northwards to Great Britain and America shows that in 1842 the British composer Arthur Sullivan was born, and the New York Philharmonic was founded. The London Philharmonic Society had been established in 1813.

147 At the turn of the century in England, a small boy with the stage name of Master Betty had performed to great acclaim, leaving in his wake a host of child stars eager to emulate his success. The full name of the child was William Henry West Betty, born in 1791 in Shrewsbury, England. As cited in Playfair, The Prodigy: A Study of the Strange Life of Master Betty, 1-3.

148 Downes, Shadows on the Stage, 12. The nature of Osborne’s disreputable activity is not clear.
Thomas Outhwaite and the Mechanics’ Institute

Prior to the advent of theatrical societies, the Mechanics’ Institute made a notable contribution to the cultural life of Auckland. English-born Thomas Outhwaite, a solicitor who arrived with his wife and family in 1841 to take up an appointment as the first registrar of the Supreme Court of New Zealand, was instrumental in establishing the Mechanics’ Institute and Library, which opened in September 1842. Outhwaite was an accomplished musician who took a keen interest in community activities, and shortly after his arrival instigated vocal classes featuring music mainly from the British Isles.

The institute was located in rental premises at the junction of Chancery and O’Connell Streets in the central business district with its hilly, muddy streets. It quickly became a popular centre for community activities in the sparsely-populated frontier town 11,387 miles from London. As Keith Sinclair observes, the loneliness associated with the geographical isolation of New Zealand was immeasurable, more especially because there was a high ratio of males to females.

There was, however, a flurry of theatrical activity. Two advertisements appeared side by side in a local newspaper (Southern Cross, 29 April 1843) (figures 3 and 4).

Whether or not it was coincidental that both advertisements appeared in the same issue of the newspaper is a vexed question. The Mechanics’ Institute debating-class topic that drew attention to the dubious morality of theatre may have discouraged people from replying to Smithson’s advertisement. However, an interesting aspect of Smithson’s advertisement is the fact that on the one hand “Gentlemen Amateurs” were asked to apply, but on the other hand they were to be paid a salary, which would give them professional status. One further

150 Sinclair, A Destiny Apart, 67-68. According to the 1858 Census, which excluded soldiers, sailors and the Maori population, throughout New Zealand the male/female ratio was 100:76.14.
advertisement was inserted by Smithson, who then disappeared: the theatrical venture did not proceed. It was some years later, when a local newspaper (*Observer*, 29 June 1875) published a letter from a reader who nostalgically recalled “the good old days” in Auckland, that the reason was revealed for Smithson’s theatre not proceeding: the magistrate had declined to grant a licence in May 1843 because he considered that theatre was immoral. It is significant that in June 1843, as noted, Osborne’s theatrical licence was suspended. Outhwaite, who was a staunch member of the Church of England, was also the registrar of the Supreme Court at the time.

The Mechanics’ Institute, however, continued to gain momentum. Outhwaite’s first musical lecture, accompanied by the Auckland Philharmonic in the large auction room of Brown and Campbell, was a resounding success. The newspaper reviewer (*Southern Cross*, 29 July 1843) praised Outhwaite’s capabilities, crediting him with generating “among the people a taste and a desire, for an innocent, and a refined amusement”. Accolades were bestowed on the Auckland Philharmonic which had played musical excerpts to illustrate points in the lecture.

In 1844 tenders were called for the construction of an institute hall. Moreover, a deputation consisting of the president and four members of the committee had persuaded the governor to accept the office of patron (*Southern Cross*, 13 January 1844). A patron gave an organisation a higher status and was in keeping with a tradition which dated back centuries. However, there were problems. Outhwaite and Mr William Young had intended to present a fundraising concert featuring amateur performers but this was cancelled due, ostensibly, to a lack of both vocalists and instrumentalists, although rehearsals had been in progress for several weeks (*New-Zealander*, 8 November 1845). In fact, the governor had refused to attend the concert, which caused many residents to withdraw their support and assistance. In retrospect it can only be surmised, but the governor may have refused to attend the concert because of crucial political changes: Captain George Grey had been appointed Governor of New Zealand in November 1845, replacing Governor FitzRoy, whose alleged controversial handling of the land war conflicts had purportedly exacerbated discord.

It was not until 17 February 1848 that Outhwaite’s vocal class presented its first concert, advertised as the “First Public Rehearsal” (*Southern Cross*, 12 February 1848). The entry fee included the cost of the book of words, which was in line with theatre conventions in England and Europe, where audiences sat in a well-lit auditorium and sang

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152 A “public rehearsal” encouraged the public, rather than just members of the institute, to attend.
with the performers. A largely English programme of songs was featured. The exceptions were “The Roses” and “Lutzow”, which were listed as “from the German”.\textsuperscript{153} Glees, trios, “quartettes”, duets, solos and choruses were offered (figure 5).

One reviewer (\textit{Southern Cross}, 19 February 1848) remarked on the high standard of singing. Another reviewer (\textit{New-Zealander}, 19 February 1848) congratulated Outhwaite because he had “at last secured to us a body of voices well able to take their parts in any English music that may be placed before them”. The emphasis on English music stresses the importance of the connection with Great Britain: the two songs translated from German were ignored. The reviewer stated that he would reserve performance appraisals for future concerts as it was inappropriate to criticise the efforts of the performers in this pioneering event. Nevertheless, he considered that some of the voices in Outhwaite’s vocal class compared favourably with renowned European artistes.

The second concert was held on 17 August 1848. It was reviewed in glowing terms (\textit{New-Zealander}, 19 August 1848), despite the fact that many of the performers, both

\textsuperscript{153}“Lutzow” probably referred to “Lutzow’s Wild Hunt” by Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826), a stirring German military song which formed part of the repertoire of the British regiments.
amateurs and professionals, had been extremely nervous. The reviewer was pleased to note that His Excellency, Lieutenant-Governor Pitt, had indicated his desire to promote the interests of the Mechanics’ Institute in every possible way. Although the *Southern Cross* in similar vein congratulated the performers, the singing and staging was criticised to an extent. However, the reviewer (*Southern Cross*, 19 August 1848) commented favourably on the attendance by notable persons, as well as the “brilliant assemblage of the fair sex”. This reinforced the importance of British notions of gentility, and the fact that it was not a classless society in Auckland.

However, by 1848 the Mechanics’ Institute started to lose impetus as it was competing with a range of theatrical activities. Outhwaite’s vocal and instrumental classes continued, nevertheless, and served as a solid foundation for musicians, foreshadowing the Auckland Choral Society. William, one of Outhwaite’s sons, would become a well known theatre critic, under the pseudonym “Orpheus”, in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

**George Buckingham and the Fitzroy Theatre**

The year of 1843 brought an important newcomer to Auckland via Australia, in the person of George Buckingham, a professional actor from England, who had migrated with his family and a small company of professional performers. Notably, Buckingham also employed local amateurs whom he trained to augment his troupe. This set an important precedent for the amateur musical theatre movement in Auckland that has continued to the present day, where it is not uncommon for professional and amateur performers to appear in the same production.

Buckingham’s troupe, who had performed to great acclaim in Australia, staged their first production on 26 December 1843 in a room which had been specially converted to a small theatre at the Royal Hotel in Princes Street. Although the programme format was not dissimilar to that offered by Osborne in 1841, Buckingham, with his numerous progeny, was perceived as a respectable family man and professional actor.

A striking advertisement, headed “Royal Victoria Theatre” (*Southern Cross*, 23 December 1843), offered an appealing programme split into three segments in line with the common practice of the era both in London and New York (figure 6).

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155 A case in point is *Hans Christian Andersen* (1980), staged in His Majesty’s Theatre by Auckland Music Theatre. The leading man was paid while the rest of the cast performed free of charge.
A musical farce entitled *The Two Gregories* (Surrey, 1821), was followed by an interlude featuring a comic song by Mr Harrold, a comic medley by three-year-old Master George Buckingham, a Highland Fling by Miss Harrold and a comic song by Buckingham. The evening concluded with a “laughable Farce” entitled *Lover’s Quarrels* [sic] (London, 1826).  

To add an exclusive touch, a dress circle had been especially constructed for the comfort of women. In addition, a band performed during the intervals. Nevertheless, the production was not well attended, although the two farces had proved popular in both London and Sydney. As the population at the time consisted largely of British migrants who worked either for the government or the military, they may have regarded themselves as socially superior beings who, in England, would not have attended this type of entertainment. Conversely, as Buckingham’s troupe was not well known in Auckland, this may have been the overriding issue.

There was some support from the public for Buckingham’s endeavours, however, because a subscription list was established to raise funds to build a theatre. On 12 February 1844, Buckingham created a theatrical landmark by opening Auckland’s first theatre, the Fitzroy, on the corner of High Street and Shortland Crescent. Although there are varying opinions as to the size and dimensions of the Fitzroy, theatres in this era generally tended to be small, wooden buildings that seated approximately one hundred people. Stage lighting consisted of whale oil lamps and footlights which were “screened by round topped shields of japanned tin”. Buckingham staged weekly performances

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159 Ibid., 12. The theatre was named after the governor of the New Zealand colony and built in only thirty-three days.
featuring the most popular fare available from England. For a short time the venture proved a success, but on 25 March 1844 the theatre closed because of salary disputes. Consequently, some of the performers, including the women, departed to set up a theatre in opposition. Meanwhile, Buckingham recruited and trained several amateur performers, both men and women, in a bid to keep his theatre operational.

On 22 April the theatre, now renamed the Royal Victoria, opened with a largely amateur cast. While the playbill mentions Buckingham, Mrs Amor and Master Buckingham by name, the amateur actors are merely noted as “Gent. Amateur” or “Lady Amateur”. The playbill advertised a Scottish Drama, Highlander’s Revenge! and a “laughable farce”, Who’s the Dupe? Normally, a musical interlude would be performed between the two plays or farces. Instead, however, a musical olio, a term which suggested an American influence, was scheduled. The olio had achieved prominence as part of minstrelsy, which was considered to be “the first genuinely American Musical Theatre, the first great indigenous entertainment” in the 1840s. The minstrel shows evolved into a three-part format with the middle segment, which was essentially a musical interlude with a comic monologue, becoming known as an olio. The performers in Buckingham’s olio, however, were neither famous nor minstrel performers and the olio content consisted of an Irish song, a Highland Fling and concluded with a Grand Chorus sung by the full company. It appears, however, that Buckingham was making an effort to keep up to date with overseas trends, which included the use of contemporary theatre terminology.

Buckingham was eventually reunited with those members of the troupe who had left to form their own company, but, for a variety of reasons, including poor box office returns, the theatre closed in November 1844. New Zealand was in the grip of an economic depression at the time. Thus, temporarily, Buckingham retired from

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161 Downes, Top of the Bill, 12.
162 Downes, Shadows on the Stage, 21.
163 Ibid.
164 Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 12. Bordman explains that minstrelsy focused on the “Negro”, the term in common usage in that era to describe the African American, as a stage character and was originally introduced by Europeans in “blackface”. The songs, dances and skits were parodies, promoting an anti-Negro attitude, however good-humouredly. The genre lost favour by the late nineteenth century.
165 Harrop, England and New Zealand, 164-65, states that on 1 January 1844 the Colonial Treasurer confirmed that while the total assets of Treasury were £2,773, the liabilities were approximately £24,000. Moreover, more than £5,000 had been owed in salaries to government officials and tradesmen’s bills since the end of the previous year. In April 1844 Captain FitzRoy, who had been appointed Governor, reported that he was unable to reduce the salaries of officers, raise a loan or draw bills.
professional theatre to establish a coffee house business in order to generate income to support his large family.\(^{166}\)

**Music Tuition and Social Mores**

Despite the fact that Auckland was a relatively new town with limited facilities, and, ostensibly, more preoccupied with commerce than culture, music teachers were providing both private tuition and piano tuning services. For instance, Mrs Bust placed an advertisement that offered not only to instruct “Young Ladies in Music and Singing”, but also to tune pianos (*Southern Cross*, 27 April 1844). In this era, musical accomplishments such as singing and playing an instrument, particularly the piano, were considered essential for well-bred women. As Richard Leppert expounds, in Europe and Britain it had long been considered a mark of refinement for aristocratic women to study music as a normal part of their education.\(^ {167}\) Thus, Mrs Bust in Auckland offered an important service, which reflected both British and European upper-class social mores.

**Amateur Theatre Societies and the Professionals**

Two amateur theatrical societies were formed in Auckland in 1848.\(^ {168}\) The Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society was established by a group of civilians and the Military Theatre was founded by the Fifty-eighth British Regiment. From the outset there seemed to be a degree of cooperation between the two societies, with a similar pattern of entertainment based on the London minor theatre model. Most of the performances were fundraisers for either war widows and orphans or the performers themselves.

The founding committee of the Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society included government officials, merchants and a member of the military. Merriman, a lawyer, worked for the government, whereas Turner was a merchant. Young not only held various government positions, including Collector of Customs, but also assisted Outhwaite with his vocal classes.\(^ {169}\) As Greenwood was a military officer, a nexus was created between the civilian and military amateur societies. A notice advertising the inaugural production of the Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society (*New-Zealander*, 2 February 1848) included the names of all the committee members (figure 7).

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\(^{166}\) The lack of a financially viable self-supporting professional musical theatre company is a problem that continues into 2009, the “small” population of Auckland often being quoted as the reason.

\(^{167}\) Leppert, *Music and Image*, 147.


\(^{169}\) The information in regard to the professions of members of the committee was gleaned from a variety of sources including local newspapers and Platts, *The Lively Capital: Auckland 1840-1865*. 

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The Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society production was based on the popular British theatre of yesteryear: *The Mayor of Garratt* (London, 1764), a spoof on parliamentary elections in England, and *Bombastes Furioso* (London, 1810), a burlesque tragic opera/drama with comic songs. One reviewer (*New-Zealander*, 9 February 1848) was enthusiastic, commenting favourably on every aspect from the full house and receptive audience to the exceptional talent of the amateur performers. A rival newspaper reviewer (*Southern Cross*, 12 February 1848) was no less flattering and commented on the fact that “Mr McLachlan (dressed in the tartan of his clan, in the full costume of a Highland chieftain) played some national airs on the bag-pipe”. During the next few weeks, three more productions followed (*New-Zealander* and *Southern Cross*, 29 April 1848), which included the farces *Make Your Wills* (London, 1836) and *The Mayor of Garratt*. The entertainment typically included a farce or melodrama followed by an interlude with singing and/or dancing and culminated with a musical farce. As the

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170 It had been some decades since *The Mayor of Garratt* and *Bombastes Furioso* premiered in London but both works had remained in the theatrical repertoire.
population of Auckland was not numerous, it was necessary to vary the programme frequently in order to attract audiences.

To illustrate the connection between amateur and professional theatre, which, as noted, exists to the present, it is fitting to mention the efforts of Mr James Stuart, grocer, who sought to revive professional theatre in 1848.\textsuperscript{171} To this end he built the Queen’s Theatre on the corner of Queen Street and Vulcan Lane, but the venture survived for only five months because of financial difficulties. The performing boundaries, however, between the amateur societies and the Queen’s Theatre were not clear-cut because some professional actors, including Buckingham and Mrs Ray, also performed with the amateurs.\textsuperscript{172} Moreover, similar fare was offered.

Stuart’s first production was a popular drama entitled \textit{The Countess} followed by singing, dancing and a comedy entitled \textit{Our Mary Ann} (London, 1838). Boxes were priced at two shillings and sixpence, the pit at two shillings and the dress circle at four shillings. Thus there was a clear delineation between the seating for the elite and the working classes, as was common practice in theatres in England. Nevertheless, the final paragraph of the advertisement included a startling dictum (\textit{Southern Cross}, 29 April 1848): “N.B. No Maories will be admitted to the Dress Circle, and the greatest caution will be exercised to keep that portion of the House select”. Although this comment did not appear in subsequent advertisements, the fact that it was included initially is a little surprising: Swainson comments that every effort was made to ensure a harmonious relationship between the colonists and Maori, but enforcing English Law in the colony was problematic.\textsuperscript{173} In this era, Maori lived on the outskirts of Auckland cultivating their market gardens, and sold their fresh produce in the centre of the town on a weekly basis to the Europeans. Moreover, Maori purchased goods from the stores owned by Europeans. Thus, to an extent, the two groups were economically dependent on each other. However, there was little interaction socially.

Two weeks later (\textit{Southern Cross}, 13 May 1848), the Queen’s Theatre advertised a programme that included the comedy \textit{Jenny Jones}, followed by a “Clog Hornpipe” performed by Mr Cuplin, a matrimonial duet sung by Mr Buckingham and Mrs Ray, a

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\textsuperscript{171} Downes, \textit{Shadows on the Stage}, 25.
\textsuperscript{172} The Buckingham family performed in amateur and semi-professional musicals until they joined an American professional troupe, Foley’s \textit{Victoria Circus}, which arrived in Auckland in 1855. Although the Buckingham family moved to Australia for a period, after the death of George Buckingham senior they returned to New Zealand in 1862 to perform in Otago where the gold rush had attracted great numbers of people. As cited in Downes, \textit{Shadows on the Stage}, 53.
\textsuperscript{173} Swainson, \textit{New Zealand and its Colonization}, 179. Swainson remarks on the superior physical strength and numbers of Maori.
\end{flushright}
farce *No Song: No Supper* (London, 1790) and a Grand Finale. A “Sailor’s Hornpipe” by Jim Crow was also listed on the programme, but whether or not this was the real name of the performer is debatable: in America in 1832 a performer by the name of T. D. Rice, in blackface, had performed a shuffling dance with contorted upper body movements that purportedly represented a stereotypical Negro [African American] called “Jim Crow”. Rice’s creation became an extremely popular stock figure and caricature, encouraging many imitators. In all probability the name Jim Crow was a pseudonym based on the American character, although in Auckland he performed a Sailor’s Hornpipe rather than a Negro dance.

This pattern of entertainment continued, with a new programme being offered weekly, often with the inclusion of dances and comic songs performed by amateurs. Eventually, the Queen’s Theatre advertised for several musicians who could play the violin, serpent [sic], French horn, bassoon, clarinet, and flute (*Southern Cross*, 24 June 1848). Five well-educated, talented performers of sober habits, three gentlemen and two ladies, were invited to apply to the proprietor. It appears, consequently, that there were opportunities available for male and female aspiring actors. Female performers, both vocalists and dancers, had established themselves in America and Britain, particularly as part of the touring companies. Theatre in Auckland was attempting to follow suit.

Shortly afterwards, the Military and Queen’s Theatres combined to stage “Mrs. Ray’s Benefit” starring Buckingham and Mrs Ray in the comedy *The Rival Pages* (London, 1835) followed by comic songs, hornpipes, a dance medley and a pantomime called *The Ice Witch*. A newspaper article commented on the likely high standard of performance because the Military and Queen’s Theatres were amalgamating their talents, which would encourage an elite audience to attend (*Southern Cross*, 8 July 1848). Thus, the calibre of the audience was perceived as being as important as the quality of the onstage performance. Again this reinforces the fact that there was a class structure in Auckland. The production proved successful.

The Military Theatre and Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society then jointly presented the farce *But However* followed by songs from Mrs Ray, Mr Turner and Buckingham (*New-Zealander*, 27 September 1848). Sheridan’s humorous play *St. Patrick’s Day* (London, 1775) completed the programme. Only one woman, Mrs Ray, appeared in the cast. On the day of the performance, however, two newspaper articles which disparaged theatre appeared one above the other in the same column as the

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174 Bordman, *American Musical Theatre*, 11. The item was performed in the interval between two serious dramas with great success. It came to be regarded as the precursor to minstrelsy in 1843.
advertisement inserted by the Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society (New-Zealander, 27 September 1848). The first article, an excerpt from which follows, quoted at length “the sentiments of several of the Christian Fathers on the stage”:

The Theatre. . . . Clement Alexandrious calls the theatre the chair of pestilence. . . . St. Ambrote [sic] tells us that the circus, the horse-race, and the theatre are nothing but vanity. St. Chrysostum says that frequently the play-house has brought impurity and ribaldry into vogue, and finished all the parts of debauchery, and introduced a world of disorders. St. Jerome cautions ladies against having anything to do with the play-house against lewd songs and ill conversation.

The full article named eight key figures in the history of the Christian Church. As this would not necessarily have been common knowledge to laymen or regular churchgoers, arguably the anonymous author of the article may have been a church leader or a closely-affiliated theologian in Auckland.

The second article headed “A Stage Duel”, the comments in which were attributed to a Spanish opera dancer called “Perchel”, referred to a production of the opera Lucia di Lammermoor by Donizetti staged in Lucca. Apparently, the rivalry between two male singers had culminated in a realistic duel on stage that resulted in one of the antagonists being killed and the other arrested for murder, causing the theatre to close indefinitely. However, the comments in the article are taken directly from a book entitled An Overland Journey to Lisbon at the Close of 1846 with a Picture of the Current State of Spain and Portugal by Terence Hughes McMahon. This suggests that a party who was presumably well-read and educated wrote the aforementioned article, but did not acknowledge the original source.

It appears, therefore, that the preceding two articles were a concerted effort to discredit the fledgling theatrical societies, as included also was a warning to women not to frequent the stage. This was obviously a criticism of Mrs Ray, who had been allocated both a role in the farce and a song. However, an indignant letter written by “A Dramatist”, defended theatrical activities by arguing that the Christian sentiments purportedly expressed by several of the Christian Fathers were “most unchristianly untrue” (New-Zealander, 4 October 1848). The writer, whose scholarly turn of phrase and knowledge was at least equal to that of the author of the original article, defended the historical importance of dramatic entertainment. Literary figures of the stature of William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson were used as examples:

In all polished nations, whether ancient or modern, the Drama has invariably occupied a most prominent position . . . English history, and, above all, English Dramatic history, present incontestable evidence of the truth of this assertion. . . . I need but point to the Elizabethan age . . . from whence emanated the brilliant imaginings of a . . . Ben Jonson, and that illustrious master spirit - the poet not of one age, but for all time - immortal Shakespeare! . . . . I know of no entertainment more rational, more innocent, or which exerts a more healthy influence upon the mind and manners of civilized man, than that which a well regulated stage is calculated to produce.
Many other observations were made concerning the benefits of theatre, drama and literature, with the writer concluding that theatre had had enormous appeal for the masses during the Middle Ages, which had “induced the clergy to encourage theatrical exhibitions of subjects from sacred history”. However, a reply written by “Argus” (Southern Cross, 7 October 1848) was sceptical because the Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society advertisement and the Christian Fathers’ article had appeared in the same column of the New-Zealander. Argus implied that the editor was A Dramatist, because there had been no dissenting editorial comment. In a tactful reply the editor (Southern Cross, 7 October 1848) admitted he had not attended the performance, but had been reliably informed that audiences had enjoyed the show. He declared that because of the dearth of entertainment available in Auckland, it would be disappointing if any theatrical activities were terminated. Thus, amateur theatre continued to flourish and, undeterred by criticism, Mrs Ray continued to perform on stage.

An interesting turn of events concerning the payment of amateurs was noted in an advertisement for the Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society in the Southern Cross on 16 November 1849 (figure 8).

![Figure 8 Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society advertisement (Southern Cross, 16 November 1849)](image)

The advertisement gives rise to the notion that perhaps the Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society was professional or semi-professional, rather than strictly amateur. It is unclear whether all members of the troupe were paid, but it is doubtful whether the society would have called itself an amateur one if that were the case. Buckingham, as acting manager, may have received a fee because of his considerable expertise and status as a professional actor. The advertisement was repeated (Southern Cross, 23 November 1849) and (New-Zealander, 24 November 1849), as if in defiance of the critics of theatre. The offer of
remuneration by an amateur dramatic society, however, would set a precedent and remain a contentious issue well into the late nineteenth century when the Auckland Amateur Opera Club was formed.

Nevertheless, theatre had been accepted as a valid cultural pursuit in the community. In reviewing a performance by the Military Theatre (Southern Cross, 9 April 1850), the critic expounded at length on the benefits of the recreation offered by that organisation. The reviewer declared that the stagnancy and monotony of life in the colonies, resulting in a “lack of social and intellectual relaxation”, had proved the downfall of many a young man. It was pointed out that the Military Theatre offered a range of occupations from acting to scene painting and carpentering to tailoring, as well as providing a community activity for the general public. Furthermore, the critic considered that the ethos of dramatic art was consistently honourable because good normally triumphed over evil. This was shown by the fact that audiences generally demonstrated their approval by shouts of delight when the villain received his just desserts, which proved that theatre had a salutary effect not only on the general public but also on the psyche of the soldiers.

The performance itself received mixed reviews. Beethoven’s Fidelio (Vienna, 1805) was considered too ambitious an undertaking, but The Two Mrs. Whites was viewed as being well within the capabilities of the performers (Southern Cross, 5 November 1850). All the same, amateur theatre had become an important part of the cultural life of Auckland: the Military Theatre proudly announced that a number of improvements and alterations had been made to the garrison theatre.

In contrast, the Sacred Harmonic Society which presented a secular concert on January 1851 caused controversy because it included Ethiopian melodies sung with “contortions and grimaces” by “gentlemen with their faces and hands blackened”. As this item was more in line with offerings from the amateur dramatic society, its inclusion in the programme suggests that the Sacred Harmonic Society was competing for audiences. Whereas one reviewer (Southern Cross, 20 September 1850) supported it warmly, the other (New-Zealander, 21 September 1850) chastised the Harmonic Society for its choice of programme. It seems that the second concert in January 1851, which featured more Ethiopian Melodies, received an enthusiastic response from the audience. Subsequent concerts, however, included only traditional items such as the oratorios of Handel. Angela Annabell notes that after 1851 both the Sacred Harmonic Society and the

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175 Annabell, Music in Auckland, 1840-1855, 60.
Mechanics’ Institute lost public favour.\textsuperscript{176} She suggests that either the inclusion of the Ethiopian Melodies may have damaged the reputation of the Harmonic Society, or that the local dramatic groups with their melodramas, farces, singing and dancing had proved too strong a force. In reality, both suggestions may be valid.

Nonetheless, the productions of the amateur theatrical societies were under constant scrutiny. For instance, it was noted that in August 1851 a benefit performance for the widow of a serviceman had been extremely successful, because it raised a substantial sum of money. The reviewer (\textit{Southern Cross}, 12 August 1851) heartily praised the standard of talent and execution of \textit{Box and Cox} and \textit{The Man with the Carpet Bag}. Favourable comments were made in regard to the clean, comfortable, well-lit and charming interior of the Military Theatre. The scenery, in the form of a drop cloth featuring “a view of Auckland Harbour, North Head, and distant islands, from the pencil of Mr Chesney” was applauded, as were the costumes.

The reviewer pointed out also that while the farce \textit{X, Y, Z}, was somewhat unusual with the “theatrical allusions losing much of their point beyond the meridian of London” it had been warmly received by the audience (\textit{Southern Cross}, 12 August 1851). It is noteworthy that the reviewer commented on the irrelevance of the “theatrical allusions” to Auckland audiences, because there was a strong tie with England at the time: all the productions were imported from that source. Part of the reason that the audience had enjoyed the farce may have been due to the nostalgic link with England. After all, it was only ten years earlier that migrants had started arriving in Auckland. As Platts points out, one of the striking characteristics of the population of Auckland was its youth, with an average age of less than thirty.\textsuperscript{177} Therefore many of the migrants, families and singles, would no doubt have left behind their parents and extended family in England.

The reviewer commented, however, that while “the utmost decorum” prevailed, he had been shocked by the violation of propriety caused by the inclusion of a lewd song in the interval between the farces, and trusted that the manager of the theatre would ensure that such a breach would not again occur. A letter to the editor, (\textit{Southern Cross}, 19 August 1851), signed “A Play-goer”, declared that the newspaper should not have mentioned the offensive song as the theatrical amateurs themselves had taken umbrage, because they had not been aware it was to be included in the programme. The writer believed that the newspaper had inflicted more harm than good on amateur theatricals by mentioning the song, because it could deter audiences, particularly respectable females,

\textsuperscript{176} Annabell, \textit{Music in Auckland, 1840-55}, 61.
\textsuperscript{177} Platts, \textit{The Lively Capital Auckland: 1840-1865}, 7.
from attending the theatre. The editor rebutted this, insisting that it was his duty to highlight breaches of propriety as a guarantee against any future offensive items and, in so doing, further the cause of raising theatrical standards (*Southern Cross*, 19 August 1851). Undeterred, the Military Theatre and the Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society continued to mount productions as fundraisers for war widows and patriotic causes. The productions included plays by Shakespeare and musicals by James Planché, which were fashionable in London.

In 1853, Robert Thompson the landlord of the Osprey Inn in High Street transformed a room in his premises into the Theatre Royal, although it was generally known as Thompson’s Rooms. Thompson appointed Thomas Hyde, who had been the supervisor for the amateur army theatrical productions at the Military Theatre, as manager of the Theatre Royal. Tom Harrold, a professional actor who had worked with Buckingham initially, led the company of performers. Buckingham, whose progeny became well known entertainers in Auckland, divided his time between family concerts at his own Venetian Saloon, the Odd Fellows’ Hall and the dramatic societies (*Southern Cross*, 1 November 1853). Consequently, the cooperation between amateur and professional theatre continued.

**Amateur Theatre Ascension and Decline**

In November 1855, the theatre world was enlivened by the appearance of Mrs Foley, a notable professional performer who would become “the first star actress” in New Zealand. Mr and Mrs William Foley, an American couple who owned the Royal Victoria Circus, arrived in Nelson in the South Island of New Zealand via Australia in September 1855. After one performance in Nelson, Mrs Foley moved to Auckland, leaving her husband and the circus to finish the remainder of the season. Mrs Foley, meanwhile, set up a temporary menagerie consisting of a few animals such as a “wild and ferocious Bengal leopard” at the Wynyard Pier in Official Bay, Auckland, which could be viewed by the general public. This provided an income to underpin Mrs Foley’s acting career.

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179 Ibid., 25. Downes notes that the company performed at the Theatre Royal on week nights. On Sundays, the theatre was used as a church. The building burned down in 1858.
182 Ibid.
Mrs Foley persuaded George Buckingham to join her in performing a series of plays, complemented by a cast of military gentlemen amateurs at the Military Theatre. The first performance (Southern Cross, 10 November 1855) consisted of the farce The Rough Diamond, followed by a singing and dancing interlude, and a burletta entitled The Sentinel. Mrs Foley played the only female role. The reviewer (Southern Cross, 30 November 1855) was spellbound by the talents of Foley, declaring that “a new era in the history of public amusements in Auckland” had arrived. Buckingham, too, was warmly applauded. The reviewer considered it was inappropriate to review the amateurs in the cast, because of the unfair comparison with the professionals. He noted with regret, however, that many of the usual performers were in the audience, seated with Colonel Wynyard’s party, rather than on stage. The Foleys moved to Wellington in April 1856.

In March 1857 it was acknowledged that the Auckland dramatic amateurs had contributed £46.9.3 from theatrical performances “in aid of the National Monument to the memory of those who fell in the Northern War” (Southern Cross, 31 March 1857). There seemed to have been a sense of community spirit as tickets had been sold at various venues: the Greyhound, Masonic, Exchange and William Denny Hotels; Queen Street retail outlets such as Mr Levy’s, Winch’s and Scheidel’s; the Mess and the Military barracks. An audited balance sheet setting out the income and expenditure of the Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society was published in 1858, listing ticket sales as £55 with expenses as £17.18.11½, leaving a profit of £37.1.0½ (Southern Cross, 27 July 1858). It seems, nevertheless, that the dramatic society ceased to mount productions regularly in 1858 after the departure of the Fifty-eighth Regiment, which had contributed personnel to both the administrative and performing ranks. However, a number of retired soldiers who had performed with the regiment settled in Auckland and established local bands.

Shortly before the departure of the retiring governor Gore Browne in 1861 and the arrival of the new governor Sir George Grey, a press release (Southern Cross, 6 September 1861) noted the various functions which had been held in honour of the departing governor and Mrs Browne. Of particular interest had been the farewell concert in the newly reopened Theatre Royal under the auspices of the Military Choral and Histrionic Society. Proceeds had been contributed to the widows and orphans of the sailors and soldiers who had perished in the land war at Taranaki. The community spirit of the amateurs who had invited Mrs Browne to the concert was praised.

183 The term “Northern War” referred to the land wars north of Auckland.
The first anniversary musical soirée of the Tonic Sol-fa Society, which was staged in the Mechanics’ Institute, was reviewed (Southern Cross, 25 July 1862) in a somewhat ponderous but approving manner. The programme was a traditional one that included a Thanksgiving Hymn, a quartet “When the Earth is hushed to peace” and the “Canadian Boat Song” conducted by Mr French, who was thanked heartily for his untiring labours. In his opening speech, the chairman of the society observed it was gratifying that societies of the calibre of the Tonic Sol-fa existed, as they provided an outlet for “modest society and youthhood”. One of the founders of the society was Francis Dart Fenton, who would go on to establish the Auckland Amateur Opera Club.184

Nevertheless, there were more important issues to consider. In 1865 the seat of government was moved to Wellington, a decision which affected Auckland detrimentally, both status-wise and financially.185 Government funding was now directed to Wellington instead of Auckland. In addition, many influential Auckland businessmen withdrew from national politics as they did not wish to journey to Wellington for the sitting of parliament.186 The seat of government was moved to Wellington because, ostensibly, the town was centrally located. However, demographics also played a role: by 1865, two-thirds of the population of New Zealand was located in the South Island, owing to the “rise of pastoralism and the discovery of gold in Otago and Canterbury”.187 Moreover, the British regiments, with the exception of the eighteenth, left New Zealand in 1867, with Britain withdrawing the last of its troops in 1870.188 While there may have been some Aucklanders who revelled in the withdrawal of the troops because it signalled the end of the land wars, others experienced a sense of abandonment.189

Groups such as the Parnell Amateur Dramatic Club, the Jewish Young Men’s Literary Association and Auckland Garrick Club, amongst others, continued to mount musical productions for specific causes from 1867 to 1871. However, the depression of 1871 was not helpful to the cause of amateur theatre. Advertisements in local contemporary newspapers, nevertheless, illustrate that there was no lack of visiting overseas professional theatre troupes from England, Ireland, Europe, America and

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184 Fenton, who was a magistrate at the time, was appointed chief judge of the Native Land Court in 1865. He was a notable musician.
185 Stone, Logan Campbell’s Auckland, 14.
186 Ibid.
187 Ibid., 13.
188 Ibid., 13.
188 Stone, Logan Campbell’s Auckland, 14.
Australia. Many performed in the 1,000-seat New City Hall, which was opened in 1870. Consequently, theatre was now a significant part of the cultural life of Auckland despite financially difficult times.

It is of interest that the English novelist Anthony Trollope, who visited Auckland in 1873, claimed that “Auckland’s ports had been the making of the city”. He viewed Auckland as a thriving metropolis. By this time, the wharves had been extended on a large area of reclaimed land on the Waitemata Harbour foreshore, making Auckland “a hub of coastal and overseas shipping” as well as a centre of boat building and marine engineering.

**Auckland Choral Society**

A notable event in 1855 was the founding of the Auckland Choral Society, which claims to be the oldest surviving arts organisation in New Zealand. As Adrienne Simpson has written a detailed history of the choral society, it is not the intention to traverse the same territory. However, it is appropriate to mention the choral society because some of the members were instrumental in establishing the Auckland Amateur Opera Club in the 1880s. For instance, Francis Dart Fenton, who was a founding member of the opera club, was also on the committee of the choral society and a violinist in their orchestra. The choral society, in fact, provided valuable training for singers and instrumentalists. It followed the English choral tradition of performing madrigals, glee and oratorio as well as extracts from opera.

The founding conductor was Joseph Brown, an experienced musician who had migrated from England with his wife and nine children in February 1855, to take up a position as librarian and organist at St John’s [Anglican] Theological College in East Auckland. As the income from this post was insufficient to provide for his family, Brown offered singing classes based on the Hullah system, a sight singing method which
was fashionable with the English middle classes. Thus, Brown was welcomed by the middle classes in Auckland, and joined an expanding group of music teachers who taught females as well as males. It seems that Brown’s popularity as a music teacher acted as a catalyst for the formation of the Auckland Choral Society. Consequently, like the amateur theatre groups, the choral society had the benefit of professional expertise. However, eventually Brown’s health deteriorated to the extent where he was unable to conduct on a regular basis.\footnote{197 Simpson, \textit{Hallelujahs and History}, 36.}

In an effort to inject some enthusiasm, in July 1875 the choral society staged its first concert version of a one-act comic opera by Legouix, \textit{The Crimson Scarf}. While the choral society had previously sung excerpts from opera, this was the first time that the singers were required to act in character. In February 1876, Fenton wrote and conducted an “extravaganza” called \textit{King Arthur, or the Knights and Days of the Round Table}.\footnote{198 Ibid., 37} Fenton’s production was a play written in rhyming verse, which satirised local politics, set to well known melodies.\footnote{199 Ibid. As this was prior to the enforcement of strict copyright regulations, plagiarising melodies or lyrics was not uncommon.} By popular demand, the extravaganza was performed twice more. Based on the range of theatre activities supported by Fenton, it appears that he was a man of many talents who constantly explored new avenues for the performing arts.

In December 1876, Fenton produced and conducted a new type of venture, a comic opera double bill consisting of \textit{Trial by Jury} (London, 1876) by Gilbert and Sullivan, and \textit{The Blind Beggars} (Paris, 1855) by Offenbach.\footnote{200 Ibid., 38.} The performers acted in character and wore specially-designed costumes, but it is unclear whether there was any scenery. It is noteworthy that \textit{Trial by Jury} was performed by the choral society only one year after it had been premiered in London. After this, the choral society continued to present a traditional oratorio programme, but both member and audience numbers dwindled as Brown’s health declined. Brown resigned in 1880, but it proved difficult to find a replacement.

By 1881, the population of metropolitan Auckland had reached 32,389 owing largely to Government-assisted passages, a scheme promoted from 1871 by Julius Vogel, the eighth premier of New Zealand.\footnote{201 ‘Summary – British and Irish immigration’, \url{http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/immigration/home-away-from-home/summary}, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 5 December 2008 (accessed 31 October 2009). The population figure excludes Maori who were not included in general census figures until 1951.} While migrants were mainly from the British Isles, Continental Europe and Australia, and possessed a wide range of skills, suitable applicants
for the post of conductor for the choral society did not materialise. Subsequently, Fenton, as a committee member of the Auckland Choral Society, invited Dr Carl Schmitt (1833/34-1900), a professional musician from Bavaria residing in Australia, to undertake the role of conductor at a yearly salary of £75.202 Schmitt was an accomplished composer, violinist and conductor whose musical interests were wide-ranging.

Glancing Backward but Moving Forward

This era witnessed many changes, from the creation of Auckland as the capital in 1840, with an influx of migrants from the British Isles that included the military, to its loss of status in 1865 when the seat of government moved to Wellington. The foundation for amateur musical theatre was established by a range of persons and organisations: David Osborne’s productions based on minor theatre entertainment in London, Thomas Outhwaite’s vocal classes featuring mainly British music at the Mechanics’ Institute, private music teachers and the Auckland Choral Society. George Buckingham, a professional actor instigated the building of the first theatre in Auckland, the Fitzroy. He set a precedent by combining amateur and professional performers, a trend which has continued to the present time. Mrs Foley, a professional actress, also performed with both Buckingham and amateur performers in Auckland.

The Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society and Military Theatre, which were the first amateur theatre societies to be established in Auckland, staged productions that were based generally on the format of minor theatres in London, with an occasional venture into opera. However, the withdrawal of British troops by 1870 affected the amateur groups detrimentally. Effectively the departure of the troops resulted in the demise of the amateur societies as many army personnel had formed the core.

Amateur theatre and music groups continued to mount productions sporadically, bolstered by visiting troupes that performed opera and operetta. Thus, the stage was set for a new type of musical venture in the form of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club. It may have been the combined talents and skills of Carl Schmitt and Francis Dart Fenton which gave the impetus to establish the club, as both were key figures in its formation.

202 Simpson, Hallelujahs and History, 41. Schmitt was appointed the first Professor of Music at the Auckland University College in 1888. He carried out his duties in conjunction with conducting for the Auckland Choral Society which funded part of his salary.
CHAPTER FOUR

Widening Theatrical Horizons:
the Auckland Amateur Opera Club et al 1883 to 1918

Prologue

The Auckland Amateur Opera Club was an important feature of the social and cultural life of Auckland for at least eighteen years from 1883/84, but is rarely mentioned in texts that recount the history of the region. Historical notations in various Auckland Music Theatre programmes, nonetheless, acknowledge the cultural contribution of the opera club, and highlight the link between the two societies. 203 Tributes are paid to the performers and committee of the opera club who are recognised as setting a pattern of thinking, behaviour and action that is closely aligned to the operations of Auckland Music Theatre. Opera club stalwarts such as Fred Earl, and the descendants of foundation members including Francis Dart Fenton, assisted in establishing the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. These historical links are discussed in chapter five.

The formation of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club followed trends in England: according to Lowerson, the amateur operatic movement in England was established in the 1870s. 204 Lowerson points out that “the take-off of amateur operatics coincided with other aspects of the late Victorian leisure boom, at least for the moderately affluent”. 205 He explains that many people, including the famous satirical writer Gilbert K. Chesterton (1874-1936), offered their views as to why people joined theatrical societies. Several common factors emerged: “the supposed freedom and fantasy world of the stage compared with the drabness of much of the urban physical framework; the monotony of much respectable employment for men, and escape from similar working or domestic restrictions for women, plus the notion of romance, both sexual and cultural”. 206 By 1883/84, when the opera club was founded, Auckland was experiencing an era of relative prosperity, largely because of its shipping industry. Thus, there was added time for leisure: cultural and recreational pursuits increasingly became part of mainstream activity. 207

203 Show Boat (1969) programme, 2.
204 Lowerson, Amateur Operatics, 10.
205 Ibid., 16.
206 Ibid., 18.
207 The art gallery, with works donated by Sir George Grey, was opened in 1887. The town hall was built in 1912. As cited in Sinclair, The Native Born: The Origins of New Zealand Nationalism, 2, the 1886
The Auckland Amateur Opera Club was the first amateur musical society in Auckland to mount regularly a repertoire that was staged by West End London theatres, rather than minor ones. Therefore, not only did the club provide an opportunity for local performers to display their operatic skills, but also it gave Auckland audiences the chance to view local talent in larger-scale productions which had been traditionally the domain of visiting overseas companies.

The main source of historical information for the opera club was the local newspapers, particularly the society newspaper, the Observer, as well as the Sporting and Dramatic Review, the Southern Cross and New Zealand Herald. It was largely as a result of the regular coverage of the activities of the opera club by those newspapers that it was possible to construct a history, albeit a limited one. The intensity with which newspaper reporters scrutinised all aspects of the operations of the opera club was fascinating, particularly when compared with the situation nowadays, where amateur theatrical productions are rarely reviewed. The interest displayed served to reinforce the importance of the opera club in the cultural milieu of colonial Auckland, and highlighted the influence wielded by the media.

From the time that the Auckland Amateur Opera Club was established every aspect of its operations from auditions, casting, staging and reviews to personality conflicts was dissected. Periodically the backstage gossip, as reported in both the arts and society columns, overshadowed the production being mounted, particularly when a critic took exception to a specific performer. Mr Charles Chambers, a theatre entrepreneur, was a case in point as the critics censured his activities over more than a decade.

It was clear from many of the newspaper articles that performing on stage was not considered a respectable occupation for women. This was despite the fact that many visiting professional overseas companies, such as the Pollards from Australia, featured women and child performers. The most contentious issue, and one which was pursued relentlessly by the media during the history of the society, however, was the fact that some of the amateur performers were paid.

The opera club, too, faced a challenge in that payment for performing rights to mount productions had become entrenched from 1879. This was due to James Cassius census confirmed that for the first time in history, most of the European population had been born in New Zealand. During the early 1880s local groups of amateurs, notably under the direction of Professor Cailliau who moved to Australia in 1884, occasionally staged operettas or works written by Gilbert and Sullivan (Freeman’s Journal, 18 January 1884).
Williamson (1845-1913), an actor who was born in Pennsylvania in the United States of America, but relocated to Australia in 1879. He became the greatest impresario in Australasian theatrical history. Initially, he secured the rights for the musicals of Gilbert and Sullivan for New Zealand and Australia, and then engaged agents in London and New York to update him on current theatrical productions. Moreover, he purchased the leases to many of the theatres in New Zealand and Australia. Thus, he controlled both the performing rights and the theatres. By 1882, Auckland had replaced Dunedin as the most populated city in New Zealand, and would eventually become a lucrative source of income for Williamson’s company.

The configuration of this chapter was challenging because of the reliance on newspaper articles, which were inevitably biased by the views of the writers. As previously noted, microhistorians believe that the observer/author is an intrinsic part of the study. Therefore, both the viewpoints of the authors of the original articles, and my observations more than a century later, became part of the study.

This chapter has been written as a series of scenes arranged in two acts, rather in the style of the script of a play. Each scene highlights a particular production and one or more of the main themes explored in this thesis, for instance, the amateur/professional question. The title of the scene reflects the topic.

**Overture**

The Auckland Amateur Opera Club was founded on an unspecified date “around about 1883-84 by a Judge [Francis Dart] Fenton and a few other enthusiastic music lovers”. The inaugural patron of the opera club was Sir William Jervois, with Fenton as president. The founding committee consisted of lawyers, accountants, government employees and merchants: “Percy Dufaur, Fred Earl, W. W. Robinson, Archdale Tayler, Phil. A. Edmiston, J. Mumford, H. Walpole, Thos. Charter (Hon. Secretary) and A. E. McCormick (Treasurer)”. The first production mounted by the Auckland Amateur Opera Club, with Herr Carl Schmitt as musical director, was not until 1885. It can only be assumed that the time lapse

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209 Downes, *Shadows on the Stage*, 79, 86. By 1882 Williamson was in partnership with Arthur Garner and George Musgrove. After the partnership dissolved in 1907, Williamson changed the name of the company to J. C. Williamson Ltd. Although Williamson died in 1913, the company continued.


211 *Show Boat* (1969) programme, 2. The establishment of the opera club coincided with two important events: in 1883, the establishment of the Auckland University College later renamed the University of Auckland; and in 1884, the introduction of horse-drawn trams along Queen Street to the outer suburbs. Queen Street eventually replaced Shortland Crescent as the main thoroughfare.

212 Centennial Music Festival Auckland 1940 programme, 10.
between the formation of the opera club and the staging of their first show was caused by the need to set up an infrastructure and raise funds. Moreover, both Judge Fenton and Herr Schmitt were involved with the Auckland Choral Society; Fenton as a committee member and Schmitt as conductor. Therefore, allotting sufficient time to establish the amateur opera club may have been a problem.

From 1885 until 1902 the opera club mounted no less than nineteen productions. Generally six to eight performances, sometimes with an extension of up to three nights, were staged. The 1,300-seat Abbott’s Opera House was the venue for all productions except the *Hinemoa Cantata*, which was staged at the City Hall. The operas of Gilbert and Sullivan dominated the repertoire (table 1).²¹³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Composer and Lyricist</th>
<th>National Origin</th>
<th>World Premiere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td><em>The Sorcerer</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td><em>Les Cloches de Corneville</em></td>
<td>Planquette/Clairville/Gabet</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td><em>H.M.S. Pinafore</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td><em>The Pirates of Penzance</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1879, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td><em>Iolanthe</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td><em>The Sorcerer</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td><em>Princess Ida</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td><em>H.M.S. Pinafore</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>no production</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td><em>Madame Favart</em></td>
<td>Offenbach/Dura/Chivot²¹⁴</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td><em>The Mikado</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td><em>The Gondoliers</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td><em>Hinemoa Cantata</em></td>
<td>Hill/Adams</td>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td><em>Les Cloches de Corneville</em></td>
<td>Planquette/Clairville/Gabet</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Mikado</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Gondoliers</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td><em>Dorothy</em></td>
<td>Cellier/Stephenson</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td><em>The Yeoman of the Guard</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td><em>Iolanthe</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td><em>Hinemoa Cantata</em></td>
<td>Hill/Adams</td>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>1896</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*sources: local newspapers of the era*

The choice of repertoire was not surprising, because Gilbert and Sullivan’s works were popular in both London and New York. Moreover, as visiting overseas companies such as the Pollards from Australia staged Gilbert and Sullivan operas at regular intervals in Auckland, the works were known to the general public. The handful of musicals by other composers in the repertoire of the opera club also reflected trends in London and New York. *Hinemoa* (1897), a New Zealand cantata, was the exception. The inclusion of *Hinemoa* may have been an attempt by the opera club to establish a sense of identity by introducing a local composer who had written the cantata using a Maori theme.

²¹³ The world premiere was normally in the country of national origin, with one exception as noted.
²¹⁴ English adaptation by H. B. Farnie.
Conversely, it may have been a purely commercial decision as the cantata was cheaper to stage than a full-scale musical and did, in fact, prove financially viable in 1897.

Act 1

Scene 1: The Sorcerer, Gentility and Cash Amateurs

The Sorcerer was staged at Abbott’s Opera House, commencing on 19 August 1885. An advertisement inserted by the opera club (Observer, 15 August 1885) announced that there were eighty performers, including “the largest chorus that has ever appeared on any Australian Stage” (figure 9).

Of interest are the two comments at the foot of figure 9, because they invoke a strong picture of the era and its social structure. Carriages would have been affordable for wealthier people, and, as babies were not admitted, women either stayed at home to babysit or had the means to pay for a babysitter. The production was not reviewed kindly by the critic of a local newspaper, who commented negatively on the general state of society in Auckland and the standard of performance (Observer, 22 August 1885):

The first performance of Gilbert and Sullivan’s favourite opera was given on Wednesday evening... . . . The dress-circle bristled with what ‘shoddydom’ delights to term the ‘upper ten’... . . . The stalls were poorly attended, and the pit nearly empty, shewing [sic] evident want of taste on the part of the lower orders. . . . . . The chorus was very weak, considering the number of people constituting it, and the orchestra was frequently at variance with the conductor (Mr Carl Schmitt). . . . . The dresses were funny; the scenery wasn’t. . . . we wish the promoters success for . . . the undertaking is a big one, when the material they had to work with is taken into consideration.

It is unclear whether the word “Australian” was a typographical error and should have read “Australasian” or whether the point was being made by the opera club that their production was superior to Australian [professional] productions in terms of numbers of performers.
Percy Dufaur, who played the role of the Vicar of Ploverleigh, was complimented on his fine singing and acting. However, the reviewer stated that Dufaur’s “ridiculous imitations of other peoples’ defects”, such as lisping or stammering, were unwarranted. Equally, Mrs Kilgour, who sang the role of Aline, was praised for her good acting and singing, but rebuked for throwing bouquets into the audience whilst engaged in an onstage love scene.

A week later there was a scathing review of The Sorcerer, stating that amateur performers should restrict themselves to private theatricals and not compete with professionals in public. The reviewer stated categorically that genteel girls should not perform on stage but, rather, should devote their time to the “Salvation Army singing halleluas [sic]” (Observer, 29 August 1885). The final paragraph read:

One thing we will say for the amateur Opera Club – that in the way of grasping ‘the gilt’ professionals cannot come within cooey of them. There is another difference between them; professionals are unselfishly liberal and cosmopolitan in their charity – the Opera Club’s charity begins at home and is likely to end there.

The sketches that accompanied the above review reinforced the criticism, even allowing for the fact that they are caricatures with a certain amount of permissible exaggeration (figure 10).

The first sketch illustrated the bouquets hitting both the conductor and a French horn, although the reviewer had stated specifically that the bouquets had been thrown into the audience rather than the orchestra pit. This intimated that Mrs Kilgour’s attitude was unprofessional and disrespectful to the orchestra. The second sketch, featuring Fred Earl applying thick paint to the face of a female performer, was obviously to highlight the fact that respectable women did not perform on stage. Heavy makeup and payment for services rendered was normally associated with women of ill-repute.
It may be that the critic was privy to confidential information that confirmed the amateur performers were paid, causing resentment. A Wellington newspaper reported that *The Sorcerer* had been successfully performed by the Auckland Amateur Opera Club at Abbott’s Opera House “for the benefit of the Freemasons’ Hall building fund” (*Evening Post*, 5 September 1885). The subject of payment to amateurs, nevertheless, was an ongoing saga throughout the history of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club.

**Scene 2: The Pirates of Penzance and Bluebloods**

The productions that followed, *Les Cloches de Corneville, H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Pirates of Penzance*, were well-received by the general public. In 1888, the opera house had been closed for several weeks for refurbishment but re-opened with *The Pirates of Penzance*, which gave the opera club production a sense of occasion. Mr Charles Chambers was singled out “for his excellent impersonation of Major General Stanley” coupled with faultless singing and acting (*Northern Advocate*, 25 August 1888). All in all, it was a flattering review which was in stark contrast to the review of *The Sorcerer* in 1885. There seemed now to be a certain degree of status associated with belonging to the opera club.

This was highlighted by the society column of the *Observer*, which reported assiduously on social events. A review (*Observer*, 29 December 1888), of a musical soirée held in Remuera, already one of the most affluent suburbs of Auckland, stated that “a most enjoyable concert took place in the aristocratic suburb on Monday evening, in aid of the Hobson public school. The greater part of the programme was contributed by well known lady and gentleman amateurs . . . The room overflowed with a most select audience. (Remueraites are blue-blooded if they’re anything)”. The performers included several opera club principals including Mr Charles Chambers, the honorary secretary.

**Scene 3: Iolanthe and the Credentials of Herr Carl Schmitt**

In July 1889 the opera club staged *Iolanthe* for nine nights. An advertisement in the *Amusements* column stated that the production would stage “new and elaborate scenery” with “costumes as used in the Savoy Theatre, London, especially imported for the occasion” (*Auckland Star*, 4 July 1889). This reinforced the link with England, and stressed the apparent superiority of products from the London Savoy Theatre compared with local products. A rival newspaper, however, announced that there would be “new scenery and costumes as used at the Savoy Theatre, London” (*Observer*, 6 July 1889). Based on the cost and the length of time required to import items from England, it is
probable that only the costumes were imported. On the other hand, the costumes may have been hired from Williamson’s in Australia as that would have been a cheaper option than paying freight charges from England. As Mr C. Nelson, the stage carpenter, was commended for “his clever handling of the scenic effects” (Observer, 20 July 1889), it is likely that the scenery was built in Auckland, based on Savoy designs. A full page of the Observer was allocated to flattering sketches of the Iolanthe cast (figure 11).

Figure 11 Iolanthe, pen-and-ink sketches of selected members of the cast (Observer, 13 July 1889)

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In the first act, the scenery consisted of an Arcadian landscape while in the second act there was “a beautiful moonlight view of the Palace Yard at Westminster, showing the Houses of Parliament”, London (Observer, 13 July 1889). The critique named several well known amateur performers who were playing principal roles, supported by a chorus of sixty and an orchestra of twenty. The fine baritone voice of Charles Chambers was praised, while the chorus was deemed to have surpassed visiting professionals in the standard of singing.²¹⁶ Herr Carl Schmitt was congratulated on his excellent work with both the orchestra and the performers. A rival newspaper (Auckland Star, 9 July 1889) on the other hand, complimented Chambers on his singing but criticised his “very stiff stage presence and individual peculiarities of expression which always marked him as Mr Chambers as distinguished from the impersonation”. By public demand, the Iolanthe season was extended by three nights.

Conversely, the Auckland Choral Society was heavily criticised for its choice of repertoire and poor standard of performance during the concert season. “Criticus” considered that this was an unsatisfactory state of affairs “for the lovers of music . . . and amateur musicians” (Observer, 13 July 1889). Accordingly, the editor of the Observer suggested that “Prof. Schmitt or other competent musical authority” should be asked for an opinion on the standard of choral society performances. He expounded that as the Auckland University College had established the first Chair of Music in New Zealand with the highly-qualified Schmitt as professor, it should inspire everyone to a higher level of achievement.

Despite the editor’s favourable comments, nevertheless, some weeks later the musical credentials of Schmitt were questioned by the general public, according to several letters sent to a local newspaper. To resolve the situation, the editor (Observer, 12 October 1889) requested an interview with Schmitt. Subsequently, a delegation, including “Strephon” the music critic for the Observer, was invited to Schmitt’s home.²¹⁷ During the interview, Schmitt’s academic credentials and his abilities as conductor, composer and teacher were confirmed: “At all events, our visit effectually dispelled all doubt as to the question – ‘Is Prof. Schmitt worthy of the reputation and position which he enjoys?’ Emphatically the ayes have it” (Observer, 12 October 1889). This episode highlights the importance attached to overseas qualifications and high standards of production. The antagonism towards Schmitt may have been orchestrated because of professional jealousy.

²¹⁶ Chambers had appeared in The Pirates of Penzance (1888).
²¹⁷ Strephon was a character in Iolanthe and an ancient Greek mythological figure. It was not unusual in this early colonial era for newspaper journalists, critics and writers of letters to the editor to use pseudonyms with intellectual connotations, thus implying a superior education.
Scene 4: A Charitable Act and Academia

The Auckland Amateur Opera Club held their annual general meeting on 9 October 1889 at the Choral Hall. Judge Fenton was re-elected president while Dr D. J. Bews was elected secretary, replacing Charles Chambers who had resigned (Observer, 19 October 1889). Two weeks after the meeting, it was claimed (Observer, 2 November 1889) that Iolanthe had made a clear profit of £500. Dissension was rife in the ranks as agreement could not be reached on where to channel the money. Some members insisted that the money should be donated to the Auckland University College Chair of Music, while others considered that as Schmitt occupied the position and had already been paid as musical director for Iolanthe, he should not be further compensated. Others believed that the profit should be divided among the performers.

However, the ever-vigilant newspaper critic (Observer, 2 November 1889) argued that anyone who was paid for services rendered could no longer be regarded as an amateur and therefore should be disqualified from membership, because the club was an amateur organisation. It was pointed out that the rule of non-payment had been breached by the opera club as certain members, purportedly, had accepted gifts of money from the club for their performances. One gentleman apparently had received £10.10.0 while “two noble lords” had been paid £3.10.0 each for “hotel expenses” and a lady had been gifted £5.218 Furthermore, the performers had been provided with free refreshments during rehearsals and nightly backstage gatherings. The Observer critics recommended that the money should be placed in a bank account to safeguard against future losses.

The dispute was not resolved until Judge Fenton, who had been out of town, was asked to settle the matter (Observer, 23 November 1889). Consequently, as noted by a newspaper critic (Observer, 8 March 1890), the opera club magnanimously donated £210 to the Auckland University College for the establishment of music scholarships. For 1890, 1891 and 1892 two entrance scholarships of £15 each were offered. Additionally in 1891 and 1892, two first-year students were offered £20 each. In 1892, two second-year students were offered £20 each. Charles Nalden confirms this, and explains that all the examinations were conducted by the Council of the Auckland University College.219

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218 The newspaper critics may have been correct in their assumptions, but the issue is complicated as the system has changed over the years in New Zealand. Nowadays, if volunteers receive an honorarium in addition to being reimbursed for expenses, then the former is taxed while the latter is exempt from tax, provided the portions of payment can be clearly identified and are recorded. Recipients of an honorarium are still classified as volunteers. As cited in “Taxing payments to volunteers”. http://www.ird.govt.nz/payroll-employers/make-deductions/staff-benefits (accessed 2 May 2011).

The 1940 Centennial Music Festival programme, which included a potted history of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, offered a different explanation. It claimed that the “Chair of Music at Auckland University was formed from the proceeds of the productions” mounted by the Auckland Amateur Opera Club. It is not suggested that the foregoing was intentionally misleading: rather it illustrates how misinformation can be perpetuated. As Judge Fenton was on the committee of both the choral society and the opera club, that may have caused some confusion.

Scene 5: The Rivals

Undoubtedly, however, there was antagonism towards the Auckland Amateur Opera Club. The success of the opera club, for instance, was perceived as having a detrimental impact on the Auckland Choral Society. In May, a news item in the society column (Observer, 4 May 1889), maintained that relations were strained between the Auckland Choral Society and the Auckland Amateur Opera Club:

Members of the Auckland Choral Society are jealous because some of their members give hearty support to the Amateur Opera Club, and in a letter to the morning paper, a member says: “It is for these half-hearted officers and members to decide which is it to be – Choral Society or Opera Club? One must go.”

The controversy was an ongoing one over a period of years, but several members continued to perform for both the opera club and the choral society. Simpson notes that some members of the choral society were concerned that Herr Schmitt was determined to introduce modern works that were beyond their capabilities. Thus, the absence of members from rehearsals may have owed more to their reluctance to perform works which were difficult, rather than because of their allegiance to the opera club.

The rivalry continued. An article by “Zipher” (Sporting and Dramatic Review, 23 August 1890), reported that there was “a good deal of personal animosity” between the Auckland Choral Society and the Auckland Amateur Opera Club. Zipher presented excerpts from letters written by members of the general public, using pseudonyms, either criticising or supporting one or the other organisation. According to Zipher, a letter written by “Fair Play” insisted that the decadence of the choral society was due to the influence of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club. Zipher, however, contended that members of the opera club attended choral society rehearsals regularly, and quoted from a letter by “Savini”:

The whole of the musical ability of the Society is not in the committee – indeed, many are inferior to the performers; and if the committee were elected by the Society, instead of being as they are, self-

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220 Centennial Music Festival Auckland 1940 programme, 10.
221 Simpson, Hallelujahs and History, 50.
elective, we should see better musicians, and more go-ahead men at the Society’s helm than at present.

Committee membership of the choral society was by invitation only, but one-third of its members were required to retire annually by rotation.\textsuperscript{222} In contrast, the opera club had a policy that any member could be re-elected to the committee year after year. Members could, therefore, serve on the committee indefinitely.

**Scene 6: Princess Ida and the Pursuit of Excellence**

Despite initial problems in gaining permission from Williamson’s, the holder of the Australasian copyright, the opera club staged *Princess Ida* in 1891. Judging by the limited information that is available, the opera club aimed for a high standard in all aspects. The elegant cover of the *Princess Ida* programme and cast list, with artwork featuring several different fonts and an elaborate border, is an example (figure 12).

Advance publicity for *Princess Ida* proclaimed that four suits of steel armour were being designed and manufactured by the tinsmiths, Waite and Lee, in High Street. The suit that had been designed for King Hildebrand was extremely intricate and displayed the high

\textsuperscript{222} Simpson, *Hallelujahs and History*, 44.
quality of workmanship of which “local artisans” were capable (Observer, 19 September 1891). Other suits of armour were modelled in the style of the period of Cromwell. Therefore, the opera club was assisting small businesses in Auckland by both purchasing locally-made goods and providing advertising.

The first night review by “Orpheus” praised “the mounting, dressing, and stage management”; Mr Neville Thornton’s scenery was highly commended (Sporting and Dramatic Review, 24 September 1891). Indeed, the season was extended from six to nine nights. The closing night review (Sporting and Dramatic Review, 8 October 1891), observed that the pale grey-blue tone of the scenery was complemented by the tasteful dresses that had been created by Mesdames Edmiston, Kilgour, Reid and Mumford. It is of interest that Mrs Kilgour often performed in principal roles for the opera club, while Mrs Mumford was the wife of the honorary treasurer; Mesdames Edmiston and Reid were the wives of committee members. This tends to confirm that the success of the opera club owed something to family connections, a propensity that continues to the present day in Auckland Music Theatre.

Orpheus did comment on the Princess Ida orchestra, remarking that certain critics considered a minimum of twenty musicians was necessary, but that he did not agree. There was no indication of the number of musicians in the orchestra but Orpheus suggested that two more violins and the replacement “of the second cornet by a second clarionet [sic]” would have been an advantage (Sporting and Dramatic Review, 1 October 1891). He explained that in sizeable buildings such as the opera houses in London the acoustics allowed voices to resonate above the orchestra, but that in smaller venues such as Abbott’s Opera House in Auckland a large orchestra would engulf soloists. Orpheus applauded the excellent performances of the principals and the women playing minor roles.

Scene 7: H.M.S. Pinafore, Community Spirit and “Chawles” Chambers

The choice of H.M.S. Pinafore for the opera club 1892 production was contentious as not all members of the committee were in favour, despite the fact that it was one of Gilbert and Sullivan’s most successful compositions. One local newspaper (New Zealand Herald, 2 August 1892), gave a favourable review of the production, applauding the sailor’s hornpipe which had been danced with great dexterity, and the cutlass drill executed by the Auckland Naval Artillery. Thus, it appears that the production was a true community effort. Moreover, the naval Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Lord Charles Scott, and squadron officers were due to attend Pinafore on 2 August, an honour indeed, and a
reminder of the perceived importance of a high-class audience. Most of all, the reviewer was pleased to report that “everything possible has been locally made, so all the money is spent in the city” (New Zealand Herald, 2 August 1892). Thus, the opera club was lauded for contributing not only to the cultural and social life of Auckland, but also to the economy. It seems, however, that there may have been some unrest in the club committee as the Tit Bits and Twaddle column (Observer, 6 August 1892) published a statement that maligned the Chambers Family:

The decadence of the Amateur Opera Club may be attributed to too much Chambers. Everything is Chambers, and, so far as the management goes, everyone seems to be Chambers. The family were all over the house on Monday night. One couldn’t throw a dead rat downstairs without striking a Chambers in an evening dress suit, with a stereotyped shop smile on his oleaginous countenance. These Chamberses mean very well, but they are so full of themselves that they haven’t room for anything else, and hence people get sick of the ‘junior’ and his relatives.

At the time, Charles Chambers was again the honorary secretary of the opera club. It may be that members of the committee who were opposed to Chambers had orchestrated the newspaper comments, but there is no proof. Mr Mumford, the business manager, was complimented on his superb diplomatic skills in appeasing those people who had been offended by Chambers. It may be that Chambers had aroused animosity because he was regarded a “tall poppy”. On the other hand, the significant presence of the Chambers family may have been seen as nepotism.

At the annual meeting of the opera club, the cash balance in the accounts was reported as £358.18.3, with the profits from H.M.S. Pinafore amounting to £88.4.9 (Evening Star, 21 April 1893). Nevertheless, the harrying of Chambers continued. The column They Say commented “that the item for refreshments in the accounts of the Chambers Amateur Opera Club requires looking into” (Observer, 22 April 1893). It was claimed that “Professor Schmitt”, the musical director for H.M.S. Pinafore, had been paid only £40 while “Chawles” Chambers had been paid £35 per year, amounting to fourteen shillings per week, for his services as honorary secretary. Therefore, it was contended that Chambers could not declare his position as honorary. It was emphasised also that the annual report of the opera club had not mentioned the invaluable services of Mr Mumford.

A week later, the Fretful Porcupine column (Observer, 29 April 1893), reported that the respective value of the services provided to the opera club by Messrs Tayler and Chambers had been debated: the critic declared that “Mr Tayler has been a good thing for

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223 In New Zealand if one has achieved success, one is sometimes stigmatised as a “tall poppy”. Thus, others tend to denigrate the success, particularly if one is perceived as being self-congratulatory. It is socially more acceptable to be modest.

224 The spelling of “Charles” as “Chawles”, in the Observer implies sarcastically an “upper class” British accent. Chambers had trained at the Guildhall School of Speech and Drama in London.
the club, while the club has been a good thing for Mr Chambers”. In the same issue of the Observer, the Pars About People column congratulated the opera club on the resignation of Chambers as secretary. Nevertheless, there were events of greater importance in 1893: New Zealand became the first country in the world to give women voting rights; and the first silent movies in black and white, and comedies accompanied by piano, were screened in Auckland.

**Act 2**

**Scene 1: Madame Favart, Amateurs, Professionals and Chaperones**

The French comic opera Madame Favart was staged by the opera club in 1894.\footnote{Based on the newspaper reviews, it appears that this was the English adaptation by H. B. Farnie.}

One critic (Observer, 24 February 1894) queried whether, in fact, the “Auckland Amateur Opera Club” was still an amateur organisation, as it had hired some paid professional performers. Mr John Fuller as Hector and Mrs Cooper as Madame Favart were the paid professionals.\footnote{The hiring of paid professionals for amateur productions was a contentious issue in England also.}

An advertisement (Observer, 31 March 1894) announced that the opening night was 10 April. It had been signed by Alex S. Reid, who was now the secretary of the opera club.

“Muriel”, the writer of the social column (Observer, 7 April 1894), deduced that the opera club was a wealthy organisation because it had never suffered a total loss on any of its productions.\footnote{As cited in Lowerson, Amateur Operatics, 181.}

She pointed out that the books at the end of the financial year for 1894 showed a credit balance of £400, in addition to other assets. The public was reminded that some years previously the opera club had donated two hundred guineas to establish a School of Music which, in the opinion of Muriel, had been of doubtful value. In fact, the opera club had donated the money for music scholarships, not for the establishment of a School of Music, as noted previously.

The opening night review by “Lorgnette” (Observer, 14 April 1894), suggested that the Madame Favart performers were disadvantaged because the musical had never been staged in Auckland. Consequently, as the cast had been unable to observe professional performances, the interpretation of many of the roles was inadequate. The views expressed by Lorgnette are provocative, given that at least two of the principals were paid professionals. The chorus of amateurs was praised, as was the staging and costumes. According to Lorgnette the dress circle had been filled with complimentary ticket-holders.

\footnote{“Muriel” may not have been a female. It was not unusual in that era for male journalists to use a female pseudonym: it was assumed that females, rather than males, were more likely to read society gossip.}
while the stalls were empty. Nonetheless, he considered the opera club deserved praise for mounting *Madame Favart*.

A matter of grave social concern, however, was raised (*Observer*, 21 April 1894). The opera club was criticised for not allowing chaperones to accompany the young women performers at the final rehearsal, in view of the fact that a group of boisterous young men had been present. This lack of decorum by the young men, which left vulnerable young women at risk apparently, was perceived as damaging the reputation of the opera club. A lengthy article in the same column expounded on the need for the opera club to protect its young women from predators. It was claimed that a young man “by reason of his exalted social or official position” had been granted backstage access and, as a consequence, had been smitten by the charms of one young woman (*Observer*, 21 April 1894). He had presented her with bouquets and asked her to accompany him on a yachting expedition, an invitation she declined as she was betrothed.

This reinforces the fact that Victorian notions of respectability were still prevalent. The articles, of course, may have been politically motivated. Of interest is that in the *Free Lancings* column of the same edition, the issue of women having the right to a voice in parliament was broached under the heading of “The Revolt of the Daughters” (*Observer*, 21 April 1894).

**Scene 2: The Mikado and Vulgar Jostlings**

Many familiar names appeared in the cast list of *The Mikado*. Although Theo Queree was chosen instead of Charles Chambers for the role of Pish-Tush, Howard Chambers was allotted the part of Pooh-Bah (*Observer*, 5 October 1895). Thus, the Chambers Family was represented. However, the opera club was reprimanded for importing both the hairdresser and the scenery from Wellington, because the “dollars from Auckland” would have been better spent on supporting local businesses (*Observer*, 5 October 1895).\(^{228}\) Mr Percy Dix, an Australian who had been recently appointed as business manager and assistant to the secretary of the opera club, was greatly commended for his tact and diplomacy. At this stage, Dix was already a professional theatrical entrepreneur and performer, but it is not clear whether he was paid by the opera club.\(^{229}\)

\(^{228}\) It is puzzling that the term “dollars” was used here, as the official currency in New Zealand was British pounds, shillings and pence. At the time “dollars” had an American connotation.

\(^{229}\) P. R. Dix, *Theatres, Halls, etc.* [http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc02Cvel-to-body](http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc02Cvel-to-body) (accessed 22 March 2009). Dix became the lessee of the City Hall in 1899, and founded Dix’s Gaiety Company, a professional organisation.
As the six-night season of *The Mikado* proved an artistic and financial success, the opera club decided to revive the production for a short season. Consequently, the principals were approached formally in writing to ask whether they were available for a further three performances (*Observer*, 19 October 1895). Everyone replied in the affirmative, with the exception of Mr A. L. Edwards who had originally performed the principal tenor role of Nanki-Poo and now demanded remuneration of £5 per night to repeat the role. The opera club declined Edwards’ request and cast Mr G. M. Reid in his stead. Edwards’ greed in requesting remuneration was commented upon. It was declared that “revivals” were inappropriate because they led to undignified “vulgar jostlings with professional companies for holiday dates and big takings” (*Observer*, 9 November 1895). Apparently, it was unbecoming for an amateur company to compete with professionals as this sullied the purity of its foremost objective, which was to promote the musical and dramatic arts.

**Scene 3: The Gondoliers and the Re-emergence of Charles Chambers**

The Auckland Amateur Opera Club celebrated the tenth year of its existence in 1896 by mounting *The Gondoliers*. As their first production was staged in 1885, it could be argued that, in fact, 1895 would have been the tenth year. Nevertheless, as productions had not been staged annually, perhaps that is why the opera club considered 1896 its tenth year. “Pendennis” (*Observer*, 7 November 1896) attended both the opening and closing performances, giving favourable reviews. Archdale Tayler received many complimentary remarks not only for his onstage performance, but also for his efforts in training the younger members of the cast, and for his work as stage manager.

It appears, however, that there were problems within the committee which led to the resignation of Percy Dix, the secretary. Charles Chambers indicated he was willing to stand for election if the committee invited him, despite his inglorious exit two years previously. Although the committee appeared to heavily favour Dix, he received only one more vote than Chambers: 27 versus 26 (*Observer*, 23 May 1896). The *Observer*, however, claimed that Chambers had been disloyal to the opera club: while openly lobbying to become secretary, Chambers had covertly contacted the Wellington Operatic Society with an offer to purchase their *Princess Ida* set and costumes in order to stage the show under his own banner (*Observer*, 23 May 1896). According to the *Observer*, it would, therefore, have been inappropriate for Chambers to be elected. Nevertheless, the entrepreneurial Chambers arose like Phoenix from the ashes.
Scene 4: Charles Chambers and Archdale Tayler Stage a Comic Opera

There was consternation in the ranks of the opera club in early 1897: Charles Chambers and Archdale Tayler had established a professional musical society called the Princess Ida Comic Opera Company. The Auckland Amateur Opera Club, reportedly, threatened to expel any of its members who performed with the opposition company (Observer, 10 April 1897). An extremely disapproving article appeared in a local newspaper under the heading “Let us be Sordid, The Princess Ida Comic Opera” (Observer, 15 May 1897). It compared the strong artistic integrity of the amateur opera club with the avarice of the new comic opera company, which had decided to distribute the profits from its productions amongst its performers and creative team. Pecuniary gain was seen not only as a degradation of “amateur musical art”, but also as an encroachment on the livelihood of legitimate professional theatre performers. The new society was strongly chastised (Observer, 15 May 1897):

It is a pitiful thing to see all these people – amateur vocalists and amateur leg-show girls alike – banding themselves together to give public exhibitions at night for the sake of the money they can make out of the business. We can applaud their merits and tolerate their shortcomings when they come before us modestly as amateurs, with no greedy purposes of their own to serve. But when they enter the stage as professionals, and fix their value at professional prices, we are amazed at their assurance.

The article expounded on the degrading influence that professionalism and pecuniary gain had had on sport, and expressed concern that the arts could likewise be tainted.

The comparison of sports with the arts reflected the attitude of the late-Victorian era into the twentieth century. Given that the summer Olympic Games as we know them in the present day were inaugurated in 1896 in Athens, this may have been uppermost in the mind of the reviewer. Lowerson points out that the “sharp divisions” which existed between professional and amateur sporting bodies “after the late-Victorian years” in Britain, were rarely evident in theatre. He does, however, concede that there was a tense relationship between theatrical amateurs and professionals, because the latter perceived that the former encroached on their territory. Some amateurs, on the other hand, claimed “that the professionals had corrupted something whose purity was essentially amateur in origin”. That is, one should be prepared to perform on stage for the love of theatre (or sports): pecuniary gain corrupted the ideal.

One critic queried why the Auckland Amateur Opera Club had not elected “Chawlus Chambers” to serve on the committee, and then answered his own question by suggesting that the opera club did not take any “cash amateurs” (Observer, 22 May 1897).

230 Lowerson, Amateur Operatics, 172.
231 Ibid., 173.
He proposed that Chambers should admit that he had invented “for cash amateurs a new method of earning double pays by quill-driving by day and opera masquerading by night” (Observer, 22 May 1897). Chambers’ performance in Princess Ida was harshly criticised. The issue of payment continued to be debated. Under the heading “Comic Opera: Williamson and Musgrove Shut Down on the Cash Amateur Business” (Observer, 5 June 1897), it was reported that no more licenses for operas would be granted to New Zealand amateur theatrical societies:

The wonder is that . . . [Williamson’s] has allowed its business in this colony to be damaged as it has been by amateur competition for the sake of the paltry royalties that are paid. . . . comic opera is essentially the business of Williamson and Musgrove. They pay big prices for the colonial rights of these operas . . . . It was quite bad enough for Williamson and Musgrove when they had an amateur opera society in each of the larger towns of the colony playing against them. Now, with two societies in Auckland, and one of these a company of ‘cash amateurs’ . . . they have been compelled to protect their own interest. Charles Chambers and his artistic friends have entered into direct competition with Williamson’s.

A letter from Williamson’s (Observer, 3 July 1897), which held the Australasian rights for Princess Ida, thanked the newspaper for its excellent article as it had clearly defined the problems encountered in dealing with amateur operatic societies. Williamson’s pointed out that New Zealand formerly had been an excellent outlet for their productions. However, musicals had now become over-exposed owing to performances by amateur companies.

The news had travelled to Australia (Observer, 3 July 1897), with an Adelaide newspaper expressing its disapproval: “In Auckland a society exists which will divide all profits made among the performers. This sort of thing wants sitting upon heavily. There is nothing of the amateur about a division of profits”. Chambers and his compatriots thus were censured in an international arena, but one could argue that with so much publicity they may have become famous.

All was not well in the ranks of the opera club, however. Mr Arthur Murphy, a friend of Chambers, was quoted as saying that there had been “shrinkage in the funds” of the opera club in the Fretful Porcupine column (Observer, 4 December 1897). It is unclear whether or not Murphy was alleging that someone had been guilty of pilfering. On the other hand Dix, an opera club committee member, was adamant there had been no shrinkage of funds but maintained that “the crisis” was attributable to “too much of the cash amateur element in the club” (Observer, 4 December 1897). This was an interesting revelation in regard to the opera club, given that the Princess Ida Company had been widely criticised for paying its performers.
The alleged shrinkage of funds was reported as far afield as Wellington, with the *Mimes and Music* column (*Evening Post Supplement*, 4 December 1897) declaring that a large number of opera club members had complained of the increasing cost of productions, particularly the salaries paid. Consequently, opera club members passed a motion of no confidence in the committee, resulting in the Reid family and Dix, amongst others, resigning. Three weeks later, however, the *Fretful Porcupine* column (*Observer*, 25 December 1897) reported that as a result of a second special meeting, the Reid family and Dix were reinstated. Chambers was not re-elected and Murphy retired. The *Observer* was almost gleeful in its reports of the perceived discomfiture of Chambers. Nevertheless, although Archdale Tayler had participated in the Princess Ida venture with Chambers, the critics ignored that fact.

**Scene 5: The Hinemoa Cantata and Celebrating a Local Composer**

A joint production with the professional Musin Concert Company in 1897 was a new venture in several ways for the Auckland Amateur Opera Club. *Hinemoa*, a cantata based on a Maori legend with music and libretto written by two New Zealanders, Alfred Hill and Arthur Adams respectively, was the chosen piece.232 Ovid Musin, a Belgian violinist and central figure of the Musin Concert Company, was a friend of Hill’s, hence the connection.

Hill was a young but experienced composer who had studied the violin at the Leipzig Conservatory. He had also developed a great interest in Maori music. His strength was the ability to meld Maori musical themes with a European harmonic setting.233 *Hinemoa* was the first work of its kind in that a Maori legend was set to music. The opening melody of the cantata presaged a *leitmotif* that recurred throughout the work, particularly in Tutanekai’s flute solo. Apparently, the *leitmotif* had been inspired by a Maori lament that Hill had heard in Poverty Bay.

It was the first time the opera club had staged not only a locally-written production, but also a cantata. Members commenced rehearsals in preparation for a three-night season at the City Hall.234 Tickets cost three shillings, two shillings and one shilling, which was a cheaper rate than that charged for operatic productions. The principals were: Hinemoa,

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232 Alfred Hill was born in Melbourne, Australia but moved to New Zealand at the age of two or three. New Zealand claimed him as their own.
234 Theatres, Halls, etc., http://www.nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc02Cycl-t1-body1-d1 (accessed 22 March 2009). The City Hall was purchased by Mr H. N. Abbott, an English migrant, in 1883.
Madame Musin; Tutanekai, Mr Geo. M. Reid; Tiki, Mr Abel Rowe; and Tohunga, Mr Archdale Tayler (Observer, 27 February 1897). The full cast of 130 performers included fairies, a European influence, alongside Maori maidens and warriors. The performances were conducted by Hill.

Local newspapers enthusiastically reviewed the cantata, commenting that the local topic was of considerable interest because “most colonists” were familiar with “the famous Rotorua story of how Hinemoa swam over the lake to her lover [Tutanekai] on the Island of Mokoia” (New Zealand Herald, 2 March 1897). Hill was applauded for his masterful interpretation of the story because the essence of the original text was reflected in the music. The principals and chorus were congratulated on their performances, with the reviewer pointing out that some of the finest music was heard in the choral and orchestral arrangements. Pendennis (Observer, 6 March 1897) was equally impressed:

The cantata is the joint work of two young native-born New Zealanders, the libretto having been written in choice and graceful verse by Mr Arthur H. Adams, a clever young pressman on the literary staff of the Wellington Post, and the music having been composed by Mr Alfred Hill. . . . Judged on the merits of his cantata, Mr Alfred Hill possesses constructive musical talent of a very high order indeed. His work manifests considerable power of originality, a mastery of musical form and command of orchestral resources, the gift of exquisite melody, and a rare faculty of seizing and imparting to his work the charm and witchery of characteristic local colour. I do not hesitate to pronounce ‘Hinemoa’ to be the finest and most original musical composition that has ever been produced in these colonies. . . .

It was pointed out, very graciously, that perhaps the genius of Hill had not been fully appreciated by the people of Wellington, but Hill had benefited from discovering a wider theatre arena in Auckland for the display of his talents. Mr Theo Queree’s handiwork in dressing the stage with native foliage, Maori carvings and mats were praised (Observer, 6 March 1897). Despite the fact Hinemoa was received enthusiastically by the general public, the cantata did not become part of the regular repertoire of the opera club, nor was it taken up by the choral society. The opera club did, however, stage the cantata in 1902 as its final production. Meanwhile, works from Britain and Europe remained the mainstay of the repertoire of the opera club, perhaps because many Aucklanders had a British and/or Continental European heritage.

Scene 6: Changes and Chambers in the Air

April 1898 marked the death of Fenton, one of the founding members of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club. Fenton had not been actively involved with the opera club in recent years, but was chairman of the choral society. Both the opera club and the choral

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235 This could be regarded as a gentle jibe by Pendennis because of the reputation of Auckland as a city of commerce rather than art. However, Hinemoa had been performed in Wellington as part of the Exhibition the previous year, and had been well received.
society mourned the loss of one who had so tirelessly contributed his time and talents to the arts in Auckland.\footnote{Simpson, \textit{Hallelujahs and History}, 53.}

The Auckland Amateur Opera Club staged three productions in 1898: \textit{Les Cloches de Corneville}, \textit{The Mikado} and \textit{The Gondoliers}. It was the first time the opera club had produced three works in one year, but all had been staged previously by the club. \textit{Les Cloches de Corneville} was accompanied by an eighteen-piece orchestra, the largest ever engaged by the opera club. The critic (\textit{New Zealand Herald}, 28 August 1898) was impressed by the high standard of the chorus performance onstage, but gently chided the club for the offstage chattering which could be heard clearly by the audience. The reviewer commented on the popularity of \textit{Les Cloches de Corneville} in Europe, observing that the musical had been a good choice.

\textit{The Mikado} and \textit{The Gondoliers} respectively, were mounted in December in quick succession but were not a success financially, although both musicals received favourable reviews from the \textit{New Zealand Herald} and \textit{Observer}. It appears that the opera club had hoped to capitalise on the influx of tourists attending the inaugural Auckland Industrial and Mining Exhibition held during December 1898 and January 1899. This exhibition was intended to mark the achievements of the Auckland region from the time of European settlement, and was modelled on various Victorian ones, which could trace their lineage to “the original Great Exhibition of 1851” (\textit{Observer}, 3 December 1898). The population of Auckland was boosted by visitors from country regions, but it appears they were intent on viewing only the various exhibits and the entertainment provided by professionals rather than amateurs.

\textit{Dorothy} was mounted in October 1899. The season was for nine nights and advertised as the thirteenth season. For rehearsals, the opera club hired the top flat of Hoffman’s buildings in Elliott Street, a few metres from the entrance to the opera house (\textit{Observer}, 22 July 1899). The cast list included Madam Chambers, while the business manager was Charles Chambers (\textit{Observer}, 7 October 1899).\footnote{Madam Chambers was Anne Buckland, the daughter of a wealthy Auckland businessman. She was a teacher of violin and singing, and, prior to her marriage, had received a grant to study music in Europe from 1892-95. On her return to Auckland, she married Charles Chambers.} It appears, therefore, that Chambers was back in favour. Madam Tutschka, the wife of a well known musician, was the costumier. In his critique, Pendennis (\textit{Observer}, 21 October 1899) queried why the opera club had selected \textit{Dorothy} as it gave insufficient scope for the talent of the performers. Madam Chambers was complimented on her performance, particularly as she had replaced Miss Dunningham at short notice. However, Pendennis deemed that although...
it had been refreshing to see some new faces amongst the principals, it was time to recruit new performers in the chorus.

*Dorothy*, as it transpired, was the end of an era because it was the last production conducted by Herr Carl Schmitt before his death in March 1900. There was another note of sadness with the untimely death in April of William Outhwaite, son of Thomas Outhwaite, who had long been the theatre critic under the pseudonym Orpheus for both the *Sporting and Dramatic Review* and the *Evening Star* (*Sporting and Dramatic Review*, 12 April 1900).

The year of 1900 also marked the end of several peaceful years: New Zealand once again took up arms, this time to fight in the Boer War. As a fundraiser for the New Zealand Fourth and Fifth Contingents stationed in South Africa, the Auckland Amateur Minstrels presented two variety concerts at the opera house in April (*Sporting and Dramatic Review*, 5 April 1900). Some members of the opera club, notably Messrs A. Edwards and George Warren, performed in the production.

**Finale**

*The Yeoman of the Guard* was the 1900 production for a ten-night season, with Arthur Towsey as musical director, Archdale Tayler as stage manager and Charles Chambers as business manager. Muriel, in the social column, reported that the Auckland Amateur Opera Club production for 1900 would be “quite a ‘toff’ as well as a talented crowd . . . taking part in the choruses, aristocratic Parnell being well to the fore” (*Observer*, 27 October 1900). Obviously, the opera club was still perceived as attracting the elite.

The costumes were the focal point: Muriel had been permitted a glimpse of the two costumes which were to be worn by Madam Chambers in the role of Phoebe Meryll. An enthusiastic description of one costume was given by Muriel: “a short petticoat of quilted white satin, with overskirt of white cashmere bordered with a band of crimson satin, white muslin bodice, with full sleeves, over which is a corselet of crimson satin; from her waist depends a crimson satin satchel, and she wears a white and red cap” (*Observer*, 3 November 1900).

*Iolanthe* was the choice for the Auckland Amateur Opera Club in 1901 and appears to have been the final opera presented under its auspices. The cast was distinguished by the presence of Miss Ettie Maginnity, a well known performer from Wellington, in the role of the Fairy Queen (*Observer*, 26 October 1901). Although the opera club was
criticised for casting a Wellingtonian, the rich contralto voice of Miss Maginnity was one of the high points of the musical. Consequently, the critics were silenced. Charles Chambers was again business manager for the production. The opera club organised a concert which raised £20 for Miss Maginnity. This set Miss Maginnity on the path to a professional career, as shortly afterwards she was employed by Williamson’s (Observer, 9 November 1901). Amateur theatre, therefore, had been the training ground for a professional performer, a trend that continues to the present day.

A two-night season of the Hinemoa Cantata was presented in September 1902 at the Choral Hall. While the Auckland Amateur Opera Club was the main organiser, the programme was a combined effort with musical groups such as the Liedertafel and other choirs (Observer, 6 September 1902). Charles Chambers was the secretary. The first part of the programme consisted of orchestral and vocal items while the second part featured Hinemoa. Ticket prices were two shillings and one shilling, which included a copy of the words of the cantata. The principal roles were allocated as follows: Hinemoa, Madam Chambers; Tutanekei, Mr Geo. M. Reid; Tiki, Mr Abel Rowe; and Tohunga, Mr Wilfred Manning. Both Messrs Reid and Rowe had performed their roles in the 1897 production.

Pendennis (Observer, 20 September 1902) wondered why the opera club was staging a cantata, pointing out that the many empty seats at the performances testified to the fact that the general public would have preferred an opera. However, the concert was received enthusiastically, with all the principals being praised and Madam Chambers singled out for special mention. After this time, according to local newspaper articles, Madam Chambers continued to perform at concerts and other productions in Auckland. She appeared also as guest soloist over the years with the Auckland Choral Society. As late as 1919 she was listed as the guest soprano soloist in Elijah by Mendelssohn.238

Curtain Call

It appears that no further productions were mounted by the Auckland Amateur Opera Club after 1902, which is ironic, as that year marked the opening of His Majesty’s Theatre.239 Nevertheless, some opera club members continued to participate in theatre. In December 1909, the Pars about People column (Observer, 18 December 1909) featured an article in regard to the demise of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club. It commented on

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238 Simpson, Hallelujahs and History, 193.
239 The beginning of the twentieth century marked many changes: the first motor car was imported into Auckland from England in 1900; Queen Victoria died in January 1901 and was succeeded by King Edward VII; in Auckland, the first electric tram departed in 1902. As cited in Wolfe, Auckland: A Pictorial History, 22, 23.
the fact that Miss Jennie Pollock was now a professional performer but had made her debut in 1899 with the Auckland Amateur Opera Club in the role of Priscilla in *Dorothy*, staged at the opera house. The reporter recalled that the opera club had “sunk suddenly into an untimely grave”, with *The Yeoman of the Guard* in 1900 being its last production (*Observer*, 18 December 1909). (In fact, the opera club had produced *Iolanthe* in 1901 and the *Hinemoa Cantata* in 1902.) However, the article contended that because there had been dissension in the ranks of the members, the opera club had gone into liquidation. In the face of lack of evidence to the contrary, this may have been true.

In the meantime, Percy Dix’s Gaiety Theatre was successfully attracting audiences with its variety shows. Moreover, several other groups had burgeoned, many of them featuring members of the now-defunct Auckland Amateur Opera Club. In 1905, Abel Rowe appeared as le Comte in *The Lady Typist*, a New Zealand musical written by Dr George Thomas Humphreys de Clive-Lowe. The Devonport Amateur Opera Club staged a concert featuring scenes and choruses from operas “by special arrangement with Mr J. C. Williamson” (*Observer*, 26 August 1905). This was a fundraiser for the Devonport First Regimental Band. George Warren, a stalwart of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club, was the stage manager. It was noted that Warren, a dentist by profession, had moved to Sydney for a time to join the professional stage. *Pendennis* (*Observer*, 15 September 1906), commented that Warren had been one of the most popular amateur entertainers, his most successful role being Gaspard in *Les Cloches de Corneville* in 1898, staged by the now-defunct Amateur Opera Club. In 1908, Warren had been offered the main comedy role in *The Tea Girl* a New Zealand musical written by Thomas Humphreys, but had declined as he was working in his dental business in Hamilton (*Observer*, 18 July 1908).

The *Pars about People* column lamented the absence of the “old favourites of the Amateur Opera Club” and conducted a nostalgic trip down memory lane (*Observer*, 3 August 1907): Percy Blackman and Arthur Murphy had moved south while Charles Chambers had travelled overseas with the Westminster Glee Singers. The only remaining stalwart was Archdale Tayler, who rarely appeared before the public nowadays. However, Abel Rowe was still performing on stage. The obituary of Thomas Mandeno Jackson, son of Samuel Jackson of the law firm of Jackson and Russell, was noted (*Observer*, 25 April 1908). Thomas Jackson had been a successful auctioneer as long ago as twenty-five years. He also possessed a fine tenor singing voice, and had participated in the productions of the

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240 Harcourt, *Fantasy and Folly*, 82.
Auckland Amateur Opera Club. At one stage he had relocated to England to pursue a professional career, but had returned to Auckland in 1904.

**Final Bow**

“Prompter” (*Observer*, 18 July 1908) was pleased to note that Mr George Hume, who had been the business manager for *The Tea Girl*, was considering whether to revive the Auckland Amateur Opera Club. Hume intended to produce the works of Gilbert and Sullivan. Prompter applauded this sentiment, observing that there was a great deal of amateur talent available in Auckland and that Hume would be doing a great service to the community by establishing a proficient amateur society. A salient point was made by Prompter (*Observer*, 18 December 1909) however, in regard to the general attitude of the audiences:

> It isn’t necessary for Australasian managers to import talent from Home. There is plenty on the spot. Unfortunately, the tendency in the colonies is to prefer the imported article. It isn’t as a general rule, any better; but they think it is.

This proclivity for imported talent is one that continues to haunt the performing arts in Auckland to the present day.

It was noted (*Observer*, 20 November 1909) that *The Magistrate*, a famous farce by Sir Arthur Pinero, was mounted at St Andrew’s Hall, Symonds Street by the amateur Welcome Club. Archdale Tayler appeared in the role of Mr Posket, after a long absence from the stage. Mention was also made of Wallace Bruce in the role of Mr Rullamy, one of the two magistrates. Bruce would become the chairman of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society in 1928.

*The Pirates of Penzance* was staged in July 1911 at His Majesty’s Theatre. The front cover of the programme states that the musical was produced by the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society.²⁴¹ It seems that this is the first, and only, time until 1919 that this title was used for the name of a society. *The Pirates of Penzance* was produced as part of the prestigious “First Musical Festival of The Empire, Festival of New Zealand” to celebrate the coronation of George V. Many members of the Auckland Choral Society appeared in the production. The star was a very youthful Miss Ethel Rae, who would go on to become one of the leading members of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society when it was established officially in 1919. A special General Citizens’ Committee had been set up to organise the festival, and included many of the performers and musicians

²⁴¹ *Pirates of Penzance* (1911) Programme, John Bellingham Collection NZMS 1141, Series 2, Box 1, Auckland City Library, N.Z.
who had appeared with the Auckland Amateur Opera Club. They included Alfred Eady, Harry Edmiston and Samuel Jackson.  

**Epilogue**

Despite the fact that Auckland had been regarded from its inception as a city of commerce, with the implication that its citizens were not interested in the cultural and aesthetic elements of life, this was not, in fact, the case. Granted, Auckland had become a commercial centre, but it had also established many cultural activities. It was the first New Zealand town to establish a university Chair of Music, and to offer music scholarships. Musical and theatrical activities presented by both local artistes and visiting professionals were many and varied.

Last, but not least, the Auckland Amateur Opera Club made a significant contribution to the social, aesthetic and economic life of Auckland for at least eighteen years. It gave Aucklanders the opportunity to view regularly productions which were staged in the West End theatres of London, particularly the Savoy operas of Gilbert and Sullivan. The activities of the club also accorded with upper-class social mores of the time, as evidenced by the social columns of local newspapers, particularly the *Observer*. Nevertheless, the payment of so-called amateurs caused some resentment in the community, and much antagonism was directed towards the performers through local newspaper articles. While the Auckland Amateur Opera Club did not survive beyond 1902, its legacy is reflected in the fact that many other organisations continued to stage musicals long after the demise of the club, culminating with the establishment of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society in 1919.

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242 First Musical Festival of The Empire, Festival of New Zealand (1911) Programme, Auckland City Library, N.Z.
CHAPTER FIVE

A Society is Born: Auckland Music Theatre Inc. Synopsis

Raising the Curtain

The purpose of this chapter, as noted in the introduction to the thesis, is to give an overview of the operations of the society during its first ninety years. It is useful to glance at the general picture in regard to the formation of the society, its policies, the management decisions made by the committee and the ever-evolving repertoire. Those issues will be discussed in more detail in chapters six to nine.

Auckland Music Theatre is the oldest surviving amateur musical theatre society in the Auckland region, with a history spanning more than ninety years. It was founded as the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society in 1919, renamed the Auckland Operatic Society in 1963 and Auckland Music Theatre in 1994. The changes of name reflected the efforts of the society to portray a contemporaneous image, in line with the dynamic genre of musical theatre.

Over the decades, the society has staged its productions in a range of theatres. Larger musicals have been mounted in His Majesty’s Theatre or the St James Theatre. Smaller musicals have been staged in the premises of the society as well as the Auckland Town Hall Concert Chamber, St Andrew’s Presbyterian Church Hall, Customhouse Theatre, Symphonia Theatre, Auckland Girls’ Grammar School Memorial Theatre,

243 The Certificate of Incorporation (AK/221367) issued by the Department of Justice and dated 15 November 1994, confirmed that the society changed its name to the Auckland Operatic Society on 3 January 1963 and to Auckland Music Theatre on 26 October 1994.
244 His Majesty’s Theatre seated approximately 800, the St James seated more than 2,000 and the smaller theatres seated from 100 to 420 patrons.
Centennial Theatre and Maidment Theatre. A committee, elected annually by members, has managed the society in an honorary capacity.

**Location, Location, Location**

Auckland Music Theatre has been domiciled in three different locations during its lifetime because of the development of the Auckland region: 33 Grafton Road, Grafton Gully from 1919 to 1969; the old synagogue at 19 Princes Street on the corner of Bowen Avenue from 1970 to 1987; and Westpoint Performing Arts Centre, 40 Meola Road, Western Springs from 1993 to 2009 and beyond. All three headquarters acquired a nickname coined by members of the society: the Hall, the Gog and the Tin Shed. The relocation of its headquarters created challenges for the society as it sought new ways to increase its membership and audience base.

**The Hall**

Grafton Gully, site of the first headquarters of the society, was located on the fringe of the central business district. It was a prime location in close proximity to the main transport route in Symonds Street, the ferry building in Quay Street, the University of Auckland in Princes Street, and His Majesty’s Theatre and shops in Queen Street. Initially the society rented the premises for rehearsals from the College Rifles Club but purchased the building and lease in June 1924. The profits from *Tutankhamen* (1923) were used for the purchase deposit, and a mortgage was raised for the outstanding amount of £350. The mortgage was repaid in 1928 from the proceeds of *The Belle of New York*.

The Hall at 33 Grafton Road was a rectangular wooden building with a tin roof, attached garage and a separate shed at the rear end of the property. Off-street parking was easily accessible. The main building comprised the Hall, which could seat up to 120 persons, a stage, storage area, office, supper room, kitchen and cloakrooms. It was the venue for rehearsals, meetings and social gatherings. Moreover, the Hall provided a good source of revenue because it was rented to other organisations for private functions. The Hall was advertised regularly in programmes and local newspapers as “rehearsal rooms.

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245 The name “Westpoint” is a combination of Point Chevalier and Western Springs as the premises are located on the boundary of those two suburbs.

246 Until World War II, Grafton was an affluent suburb but deteriorated as people moved to outer suburbs.

247 A letter from Dawson & Stilwell, Solicitors, dated 9 June 1924, confirms that the building was sold under a leasehold arrangement with the Auckland City Council.

248 Committee minutes, 2 November 1928. There is no record of the initial amount of the deposit.
available for social gatherings of all kinds: dances, weddings and birthday parties, meetings, entertainments".  

The society was forced to relocate in 1969/1970 because the site was required for motorway construction. However, provision had been made for this contingency in 1966 when the society established the Auckland Musical Arts Trust, which was incorporated under the Charitable Trusts Act 1957. All assets and cash reserves, except for £1,000, were assigned to the trust. As the leasehold interest on 33 Grafton Road was also transferred to the trust, it received $14,000 compensation when the Ministry of Works acquired the site for motorway construction. This money was invested.

The Gog

After intensive negotiation with Auckland City Council, from 1970 the trust acquired a five-year lease on the deconsecrated old synagogue at 19 Princes Street, on the corner of Bowen Avenue. There was a nominal rental. The site was located approximately one kilometre north of 33 Grafton Road, towards the central business district. Both the trust and the society envisaged the new site as a civic cultural centre, rather than solely the headquarters of the Auckland Operatic Society. Therefore, the application was broadened to include 21 Princes Street, with the intention of persuading council to grant a 21-year lease for both buildings. The society was to be the sole tenant at 19 Princes Street and the head tenant at 21 Princes Street.

Council finally agreed, and the Gog became headquarters for the next seventeen years. A smaller building, known as the classroom block, which adjoined the synagogue was eventually developed as the Bowen Studio Theatre. Auckland City Council refused permission to convert the synagogue itself into a theatre because of its heritage value, but

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249 The New Moon (1936) programme, 12.
250 At a special general meeting on 11 December 1966, fifty-five members voted to set up a trust with four trustees. The inaugural trustees included Bruce Duncan (chairman), Derek Firth, Rex Sayers and Roy Severs. All had been, or were, committee members of the society. Two trustees were required to retire annually, but could be re-elected by members. The society was required to pay five per cent of its gross takings from theatrical productions, plus fifty per cent of hireages, to the trust. The trust document was drawn up by Mr Derek Firth a lawyer with considerable musical skills, who had joined the society in 1964. The trust and the society are two separate legal entities. Should the society become insolvent, the assets would remain in the trust.
251 Committee minutes, 19 December 1966. Additional costumes, stage lights, properties, sets and other assets were assigned to the trust in 1991, as noted in the Auckland Musical Arts Trust annual report 28 April 1991.
252 Address by Mr M. R. Grierson, chairman, Auckland Musical Arts Trust, 13 March 1977. Decimal currency was introduced in 1967.
253 Ibid. Auckland City Council had originally intended to demolish all the old houses and the synagogue complex in Princes Street. The trust spent five years persuading council not to proceed with the demolition and to grant it a 21-year lease on the old synagogue. Those buildings are still functional in 2009, many as part of the University of Auckland campus.
allowed its use as a rehearsal area. Initially, however, small-scale productions were performed in the old synagogue while the Bowen Studio Theatre was being constructed. Several organisations leased the premises at 21 Princes Street: the Northern Regional Arts Council, the Musicians’ Union, Actors Equity, the Balkan Folkloric Orchestra, the Auckland Handweavers’ Guild, the Tzinakis Orchestra and the Workers’ Education Association.254 The society leased the basement for the storage of costumes. Thus, the Auckland Arts Centre was finally established. In 1974, the trust successfully obtained a grant of $30,000 from the capital grants scheme administered by the Minister for Internal Affairs towards the first stage of the theatre development proposal, and a further grant of $2,000 from the Sport and Recreation Fund. The grants were subject to the society raising a further $10,000 in its own right.

It seemed that the society had entered into a new golden age of theatre: not only were its assets protected and a long-term lease a possibility, but also it was domiciled in a prestigious location in the cultural heart of Auckland. Leafy Princes Street was lined with many grand homes, the heritage left by wealthy families who had lived in the area. It was home also to the historic Northern Club built in 1867, old government house and the University of Auckland campus. A short downhill walk through Albert Park, originally the site of the Albert Barracks, led to the main library, art gallery and theatres.

However, the structural condition of the old synagogue was less than satisfactory, and it was classified as a heritage building. Consequently, the society was forced to meet certain statutory requirements when it constructed the Bowen Studio Theatre.255 In March 1973, many archival documents belonging to the society were destroyed when the premises were flooded. A leaking roof was responsible for the flooding, and eventually the high cost of maintenance proved beyond the means of the society. Therefore, in 1987, after three years of negotiation, the trust sold back the lease to the Auckland City Council. A consortium called the Small Hotel Company expressed interest in the site and, through council, undertook to pay the society $125,000 in exchange for the lease.256 In addition, the consortium agreed to pay a further $25,000 from the grand opening function proceeds, on the condition that the society assisted with volunteer labour for the evening. This duly eventuated.

After lengthy negotiations, Auckland City Council agreed to provide the trust with a block of land, approximately 200 m² in area, upon which to build a theatre and

254 Address by Mr M. R. Grierson, 13 March 1977.
255 The old synagogue was completed in 1885. It was designed by Edward Bartley, an Auckland architect who also designed the Opera House in Wellesley Street in 1882.
workshop with additional space for off-street parking. At the option of council, the site would be either freehold or leasehold for thirty-three years, and renewable for the same length of time at a nominal rental which would not be reviewed. Council agreed also to pay the trust $25,000 in cash. Moreover, it donated to the society the weatherboard hall at 31 Princes Street, which had originally belonged to the University of Auckland Music Department. It was agreed that the rental of the basement at 21 Princes Street by the society would continue for a further six months, or until one month after the removal of the weatherboard hall at 31 Princes Street to a permanent site. In the event of the council being unable to find a site within eighteen months, it undertook to pay to the trust $100,000 in lieu thereof.

In reality, the society was homeless for approximately six years from 1987. During that time, many of its smaller assets were stored in the homes of members. Many of those members had been volunteer workers for the society for many years. Larger items, such as scenery, were stored in a building owned by council. This, however, proved to be a problem as council sold the building where the chattels were stored without informing the society: several items vanished. Subsequently, concern was expressed by the trust in regard to the increasing difficulty of keeping track of assets.

Finding new premises in close proximity to the central business district proved difficult. As the motorway network expanded in the centre of the city many buildings were demolished, streets disappeared and, with them, parking space. Although multi-storey parking buildings were erected, the hourly rates for parking were high. The society was faced with a major dilemma: if it moved too far from the central business district, its audience base could diminish. However, the reality was that many people had moved out of the inner city as part of the urban sprawl after World War II, and a host of musical groups had been established in outlying suburbs. Therefore, it was imperative to find a location where the society could have its own territory. Meanwhile, rehearsals and performances took place in a range of rented venues in the Auckland area. To add to the woes of the society their main performance venue for large-scale productions, His Majesty’s Theatre in Queen Street, was demolished in 1988. Nevertheless, the society

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257 Groups of volunteers participated in “working bees” where they performed various jobs such as painting the outside of the building. This saved money for the society as no labour costs were involved.

258 Auckland Musical Arts Trust annual report, 28 April 1991. It is evident that there was some tension between the trust and the society committee as some members of the latter considered that they had lost autonomy. However, the trustees were, and are, elected by members of the society.
survived. This was unlike its two inner-city rivals, Theatre Arts and the Auckland Light Opera Club: the former ceased operations in 1966 and the latter in 1989.\textsuperscript{259}

**The Tin Shed**

After negotiations over a period of several years, the trust leased from council a block of land adjacent to the Museum of Transport and Technology (Motat) in Meola Road, Western Springs, located in the inner western suburbs eight kilometres from the central business district. Western Springs was a former working-class area that had been gradually gentrified, as had the neighbouring suburb of Point Chevalier.

The original aim had been to construct a 300 or 400 seat theatre with a flytower, but this proved unrealistic financially. Instead, the Westpoint Performing Arts Centre was built during 1992 and 1993. This complex consisted of three adjoining buildings. Two of the buildings were shaped like aircraft hangars. The first, built of corrugated iron, housed a foyer, a 122-seat theatre with raked seating and a wooden stage, dressing rooms, a green room, kitchenette and toilets. The second, also of corrugated iron, was used for the construction of sets and properties. This area was large enough to accommodate a set that could be used in large city venues such as the 2,200-seat Civic Theatre. The third, a rectangular wooden building which was removed from 31 Princes Street, was used to store costumes and properties. Ample parking space surrounded the complex.

**The Historical Links**

In many of its programmes and chairman’s reports, Auckland Music Theatre pays tribute to the endeavours of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club, noting the first production, *The Sorcerer*, and stressing the connection between the two societies.\textsuperscript{260} There are some links. Mrs Archdale Tayler, a performer with the opera club, served on the inaugural committee of the operatic society. Fred Earl, a performer and committee member of the opera club, became the first president of the operatic society. He held that post until 1937. Surnames such as Chambers, Crowther, Eady, Fenton, Jackson, Reid and Warren, for example, which featured in the programmes of the opera club, also appeared

\textsuperscript{259} The financial failure of the Light Opera Club was due largely to the fact that one of the committee members had embezzled the funds of the society over a period of years. He was duly prosecuted. It appears the club did not have the necessary procedures in place that would have detected discrepancies in the accounts.

\textsuperscript{260} For instance, in the *Show Boat* (1969) programme, 1.
in the early records of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. Miss Ethel Rae, who had played the role of Mabel in *The Pirates of Penzance* in 1911, was the leading lady in many Auckland Amateur Operatic Society productions during the 1920s, and remained a member until the 1970s.

**The Repertoire**

From 1919 to 2009 the society mounted no fewer than 180 productions: 149 (83%) musicals, 21 (12%) revues/concerts, 8 (4%) plays, and 2 (1%) ballets. Musicals have been the mainstay of the society (figure 13).

![Analysis by genre of productions staged from 1919 to 2009](image)

Figure 13 Analysis by genre of productions staged from 1919 to 2009

While the original objects of the society were to promote opera, drama and music, in 1946 it was decided to diversify by including ballet. Consequently, the Auckland Ballet Guild was affiliated with the society in 1947, but retained its independence. This was at the behest of famous ballet teachers such as Miss Cecil Hall, whose students appeared regularly in the musicals of the society. The 1947 Ballet Season, starring Miss Rachel Cameron, was produced jointly with the Auckland dancing studios, but ballet did not become part of the mainstream repertoire of the society.

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261 It has not proved possible to trace the exact familial links between members of the opera club and the society, but it appears that some of the descendants continued the musical tradition. Roger Fenton who was on the inaugural committee of the society, for example, was the son of Judge Fenton. Dulcie Fenton performed in *Our Miss Gibbs* (1922). Arthur Eady played in the orchestra for the opera club. Lewis Eady Ltd was the main ticket booking agency for theatrical productions until the 1980s. In 2009, the firm is a leading Auckland music retailer and music tutoring enterprise.

262 Annual report, 26 February 1946.

263 Celebrity Entertainment (1947) programme, 3.
Only two official concerts, one each in 1929 and 1939, have been produced. Both were fundraisers. Plays were introduced as a cheaper alternative to musicals in 1951, but only eight were staged up until 2009: five British and three American. The first revue was staged in 1961, with twenty-one revues being produced overall. It was difficult to determine the exact content of the revues, as many of the programmes did not list the items in detail. According to hearsay, some of the lyrics were rewritten to existing melodies by various committee members and performers, but it appears that the content may have been split evenly between British and American sources with a sprinkling of European operetta. However, in the interests of accuracy, it is preferable not to make uncorroborated assumptions.

The number of musicals appears to have peaked from 1970 to 1992 and declined from 1993 to 2009 (figure 14). However, the former period spans twenty-three years while the latter spans only seventeen years.²⁶⁴

![Analysis by era of genres staged from 1919 to 2009](image)

Overall, the period from 1946 to 1969 shows the greatest diversification: musicals, revues, plays and ballets were staged, as the society attempted to broaden its audience base. Nevertheless, two different patterns emerge during this era, one from 1946 to 1953 and the other from 1954 to 1969. During the former, musicals, plays and ballets were staged while during the latter only musicals and revues were mounted. Again, from 1970 to 1992 only

²⁶⁴ From 1970 to 1992, an average of 2.17 musicals per year was staged, while from 1993 to 2009 an average of 2.12 musicals per year was staged.
musicals and revues were mounted. Conversely, from 1993 to 2009 plays were included in the repertoire because they were cheaper to produce than musicals. Apart from 1932, 1941 and 1942 when no productions were staged, the society mounted from one to four shows annually. From 1919 to 1945 one or two shows were mounted annually, but by 1951 the number had risen to three and by 1978 it had risen to four. Subsequently, the number of productions fluctuated from one to four per year.

Over a ninety-year span the society staged 149 musicals: American 83 (56%); British 49 (33%); New Zealand 7 (5%); and European (Czechoslovakian, French, German in Anglicised version, and Australian) 10 (7%) (figure 15).

![National origin of musicals staged from 1919 to 2009](image)

The society has established a tradition of musical theatre based overwhelmingly on works of British and American origins. This may not seem surprising given the historical connection with both Great Britain and America, including the common language. However, ethnic diversity has increased significantly over the decades: by the late twentieth century Auckland was the largest Polynesian city in the world, with Europeans constituting only 56.5% of the population.

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265 In 1941, the society combined with other organisations to stage *The Lilac Domino* but the musical was not produced under its own banner. This is discussed in chapter six.

266 *Dick Whittington* (1946) was included as a New Zealand musical because it was difficult to classify: the script and lyrics were written by Leo Pilcher, a committee member, who borrowed melodies from well known songs such as “Zippity-Doo-Dah”, as well as writing some of the music. As the script has been lost it is not possible to check the songs. *Dick Whittington* is discussed in detail in chapter six. European and Australian musicals have been grouped together under “others”.

267 Statistics New Zealand. 'QuickStats About Auckland Region'. [www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2006CensusHome Page/Quick Stats/About Place/SnapShot](accessed 5 November 2007). The 2006 Census classified the population in Auckland as 56.5% European, 11.1% Maori, 18.9% Asian, 14.4% Pacific Island and 0.9% African/Latin American/Middle Eastern.
According to Statistics New Zealand, the European population formed the main audience for musical theatre and opera for the year ended June 2007: 23% of Europeans and 11% of Maori attended live performances of both musical theatre and opera.\(^{268}\) Attendance by other ethnic groups, including Pacific Islanders, Asians and Latin Americans, was negligible. Thus, the diminishing European population could eventually result in a decline in musical theatre audiences. This is a trend which exists elsewhere. Kenrick comments, for instance, that Broadway audiences consist mainly of “white faces”.\(^{269}\) A glance at the audience in the auditorium of Westpoint confirms that “white faces” also prevail.

The rise in the number of American musicals staged by Auckland Music Theatre is evident (figure 16).

![Analysis by era of the national origin of musicals staged by Auckland Music Theatre](image)

*Figure 16 Analysis by era of the national origin of musicals staged by Auckland Music Theatre*

The number of British musicals rose slightly in each of the first three eras but as the works of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, Cole Porter and Jerome Kern entered the canon from 1946 to 1969, the number of American musicals increased significantly.


Songs from American musicals were played regularly on Auckland radio stations, and became the popular music of their time.

Hollywood musicals graced Auckland cinema screens. They introduced the general public to the very popular Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy from the 1930s, and in ensuing decades to Gordon MacRae, Doris Day, Howard Keel, Shirley Jones, Mitzi Gaynor, Ethel Merman and Julie Andrews, amongst others. Thus, audiences often saw the screen version of a musical well before the stage production.

The era from 1970 to 1992 was one of major contrasts, with the works of Stephen Sondheim, Harnick and Bock, and Andrew Lloyd Webber entering the repertoire.\(^{270}\) During this period, the number of American musicals was double that of British musicals in the Auckland Music Theatre repertoire. Indeed, the popularity of American musicals shows no signs of abating: from 1993 to 2009 the number of American musicals staged was more than triple that of British (figure 16).

It is noteworthy that as early as 1946 John Cowie Reid expressed concern that New Zealanders had been subjected to very little cultural stimulation from abroad, which had had a detrimental effect on their creativity. He maintained that the only cultural stimulus had been “the recent short visits of American servicemen, combined with the drug-like addiction of our people to American films, magazines and music”.\(^{271}\) While many migrants from a range of cultures have settled in New Zealand since 1946, the American influence continues through the media and travel.

The Savoy operas of Gilbert and Sullivan have been rarely performed by Auckland Music Theatre, with the exception of *The Gondoliers* and *The Mikado*. Nevertheless, *The Gondoliers* has been staged over the widest time span in the history of the society: 63 years elapsed between its first production in 1919 and its third production in 1982. The second production was staged in 1949. *The Gondoliers* was chosen as a tribute to their first (inaugural) production. Although copyright had expired on Gilbert and Sullivan’s works in 1961, the society did not stage *The Gondoliers* again until 1982.\(^{272}\)

During its first ninety years the society presented 27 musicals two or more times: American, 13 (48%); British, 11 (40%); New Zealand, 1 (4%); French (Anglicised version), 2 (8%). The most-performed musical, which has been staged four times, is an

\(^{270}\) Informally, members point out with a hint of pride that the society is known as the “Sondheim Society”. Seven Sondheim musicals were staged between 1997 and 2009. When amateur rights to Webber’s shows finally became available after many years, musical societies were quick to take advantage.

\(^{271}\) Reid, *Creative Writing in New Zealand*, 6.

\(^{272}\) In the early 1960s the Pocket Opera Club, which specialised in the works of Gilbert and Sullivan, was set up in Auckland. It is now defunct and the dates of its establishment and demise are not available. As cited by Brian O’Connor in his personal interview, 15 May 2007.
American one: *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. Five musicals have been presented three times: American, 2 (40%); British, 2 (40%); New Zealand, 1 (20%).

Twenty-one musicals have been staged twice: American, 10 (48%); British, 9 (43%); and French (Anglicised version), 2 (9%) (table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Musical</th>
<th>National Origin</th>
<th>First Production</th>
<th>Second Production</th>
<th>Third and Fourth Productions</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Gondoliers</em></td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>1982</td>
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<tr>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>1944</td>
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<td><em>Tutankhamen</em></td>
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<td>1924</td>
<td>1930</td>
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<td><em>The Belle of New York</em></td>
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<td>1934</td>
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<td>France</td>
<td>1933</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>1978</td>
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<td>France</td>
<td>1967</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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<td>UK</td>
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<td><em>Company</em></td>
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<td>2002</td>
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<td><em>Hair</em></td>
<td>USA</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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</table>

*Sources: Auckland Music Theatre records*

Based on the information available in the minutes, generally the musicals were staged as new productions each time. The exception was the 1924 production of *Tutankhamen*, which was a repeat season. Although the society advertised the 1984 production of *Annie* as a “return” season, there were some cast changes and a new musical director was appointed.²⁷³ Scenery and costumes were refurbished. *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* was staged in two consecutive years, 1970 and 1971, but the latter production was not a repeat of the former. In 1970, *Forum* was staged by the

society as part of the Auckland Festival in the Town Hall Concert Chamber, while in 1971 a new production was mounted by the touring company.

Financial viability appears to have been the overriding factor in making the decision to resurrect a musical: with the exception of *Kismet*, all had made a profit in their first season. However, decades elapsed between the first and subsequent season in some cases. Most of the productions that have been resurrected are book musicals, some loosely based on historical events. Nevertheless, not all productions made a profit in their second or subsequent production.

The following four chapters will show how a local community, known as Auckland Music Theatre, adapted to changing social, economic and aesthetic issues affecting the realm of musical theatre in the context of an evolving urban environment.

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274 A book musical is one with a coherent, meaningful plot which integrates song and dance. *Show Boat*, based on a famous novel, is commonly regarded as the first integrated musical. *Oklahoma!* is an example of a book musical.
CHAPTER SIX

Establishing Local Theatrical Traditions:
the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society 1919 to 1945

The Hall in Grafton Gully

The population of Auckland had grown to 308,766 by 1919 but, unlike many smaller towns throughout New Zealand, the city did not have a resident amateur musical theatre society. Thus, the founding of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society on 14 June 1919 coincided with the beginning of a new era socially and politically. On 28 June 1919, fourteen days after the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society was registered, the New Zealand Prime Minister William Massey signed the Treaty of Versailles peace settlement as one of the representatives of the allied powers that won World War I.275

The twenty-seven years from 1919 to 1945 witnessed many social changes in the Auckland region. There was a considerable influx of migrants into Auckland, particularly from the British Isles. Moreover, many World War I Expeditionary Force soldiers returned with overseas brides and children, and brought a new range of experiences influenced by their time in active combat. Interestingly, the soldiers cast the deciding vote in the April 1919 nationwide licensing referendum, facilitating the defeat of prohibition by only two per cent, much to the chagrin of the New Zealand temperance communities.276

In the aftermath of the World War I Armistice on the one hand and the 1918 influenza pandemic on the other, a local newspaper (New Zealand National and Sporting Dramatic Review, 9 January 1919) reported as a matter of concern that no news had been

275 ‘William Massey’, http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/people/william-massey, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 22-April-2009 (accessed 30 October 2009). New Zealand in its own right joined the newly-established League of Nations and was given the mandate to administer Samoa. In years to come, this decision would have a major impact on New Zealand, particularly Auckland, with an increase in migrants from the Pacific Islands.

received from Williamson’s in Australia with regard to forthcoming theatrical attractions destined for Auckland. This highlights not only the importance of theatre in the cultural milieu of Auckland but also the power wielded by Williamson’s as the lessee of His Majesty’s Theatre and holder of rights to a large number of theatrical productions and films. The influence of Williamson’s was further reinforced in the 1920s by the availability of a free new weekly magazine: the *Williamson’s Weekly*, described as “the Official Organ for Williamson Films (N.Z.) Ltd. and general J. C. Williamson interests in New Zealand”.277 This publication listed both screen and live entertainment with a schedule of performance times and ticket prices. It included also articles featuring famous overseas entertainers, particularly American film stars.278

Generally, there was an upsurge of theatrical interest as several theatres were built in this era: the Majestic (1925), the Regent (1926), St James (1928) and Civic (1929). It was the era of silent films, but live theatre performers were used as pre-film entertainers in the “prologue”.279 Some Auckland Amateur Operatic Society members participated. For instance, Doreen O’Leary, a dancer and choreographer, featured in the prologue before *The Gold Rush* (1925), a film starring Charlie Chaplin.280 In addition, the Peter Pan Cabaret and the Floating Showboat, built in 1930 and 1936 respectively, added to the Auckland entertainment venues. The cast and crew of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society productions would often congregate at those venues for the opening night party.

Newspapers continued to be influential but their dominance was gradually eroded by radio, an effect which was reflected in the marketing strategies used by the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. Many influential people who controlled the radio stations were associated with the society. Although wireless telegraphy had been discovered in the 1890s and rapidly brought under government control, the first broadcasting programme in Auckland was not licensed until 1921.281 Commercial broadcasts were permitted in 1922 but advertising was prohibited. To offer a more professional service, therefore, the Radio Broadcasting Company of New Zealand was set up in 1925, and by the end of World War II nearly every New Zealand home owned a radio.282

Radio station 1ZR, one of the first private stations in Auckland, was owned by the Lewis Eady Music Shop, which was the booking office for productions staged by the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. Lewis Eady was a committee member of the society

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277 *Williamson’s Weekly*, 20 October 1927.
278 Ibid. The cost of printing was financed by firms who advertised their services in the publication.
280 Ibid.
282 Ibid.
from 1924. Sir Ernest Davis, who became mayor of Auckland and patron of the society in 1935, was a part-owner of radio station 1ZB. Rex Sayers, a radio announcer, was elected to the committee in 1937. These were valuable contacts for the operatic society, which would use radio advertising extensively in ensuing years.

This chapter will explore the procedures and policies implemented to establish the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society as a formal entity, the influence wielded by the committee, the social tone adopted and the selection process for membership. Other issues that will be explored include the choice of repertoire compared with the West End of London and Broadway in New York, the constraints of copyright, the reception by critics and audiences, and the contribution of the society to the cultural life of Auckland.

**Showtime in Auckland**

A significant event transpired in the cultural history of Auckland with the formation of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society on 14 June 1919. The premises of the society were situated on the fringe of the central business district at 33 Grafton Road, Grafton Gully from 1919 to 1945 and beyond. Initially, the premises were rented, but were purchased in 1924. The society was registered as a charitable trust and thus qualified for a tax exemption, provided its activities benefited the community. As there were strict legal requirements under the Incorporated Societies Act 1908, the society created twenty-seven rules to deal with every possible contingency. The objects were threefold:

(a) To cultivate and advance the arts of the opera, drama, or music in New Zealand in their various branches.
(b) To provide healthy instruction and amusement for the members of the Society by the production of operas, and other musical or dramatic entertainments for the benefits of the Society and for charitable, philanthropic and patriotic objects.
(c) To do all such other things as are incidental to or conducive to the attainment of the above objects or acquired, dispose of, lease, hire, borrow, lend, mortgage and in any other way deal with or in real and personal property.  

Not only did the society undertake to promote several branches of the performing arts, but also it provided for the wellbeing and entertainment of members and embraced the wider community. In 1919, Auckland did not have a professional resident opera, ballet or drama society, hence the reliance on productions imported from overseas, particularly by Williamson’s. Therefore, it appears that the group of people who founded the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society recognised that it was time to establish a local theatre company, albeit an amateur one, with a mandate to provide a broad spectrum of entertainment on a regular basis.

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283 Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, rule 3.
The management of the society was vested in a committee of twelve members consisting of a chairman, vice-chairman, secretary/treasurer and nine members, all of whom were to be elected annually by financial members. The committee had the power to co-opt additional members, including an honorary treasurer and an auditor to ensure that financial accounts were maintained in accordance with statutory requirements. Provision was made for the election at the annual general meeting of a patron, a president and two or more vice-presidents to hold office for one year. Those roles were decorative but gave the society status. The patron was normally the governor-general of New Zealand, while the president was the mayor of Auckland or a well known citizen. Vice-presidents were normally respected older members of the society.

High Society

The committee which founded the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society included some notable citizens whose presence created an aura of elitism, a perception which was reinforced by a study of the records of the society. This gives rise to the notion that while the New Zealand way of life, ostensibly, was based upon egalitarian principles rather than the class structure of Great Britain, the availability of time and/or money to devote to the cause, as well as an interest in theatre, was implied.\(^{284}\) As at the date of writing this thesis, *The Geisha* (1920) is the earliest programme belonging to the society which it has been possible to locate.\(^{285}\) Accordingly, this is one of the more significant historical documents as it provides information not available elsewhere: it is assumed that the committee listed on the back cover of the programme was the inaugural one:


It is of interest to look at the background of various committee members.\(^{287}\) Davis, who was born Marion Mitchell, had been a well known singer in Dunedin before moving to Auckland to marry Ernest Davis, an eminent local government employee.\(^{288}\) John Walklate had been general manager of Auckland Tramways in the first decade of the twentieth century. W. J. (William) Crowther was a businessman of wide-ranging skills.

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\(^{284}\) Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, rule 6, states “the colours of the Society shall be old gold and royal blue”, rather in the tradition of British school colours.

\(^{285}\) It was not possible to locate minutes of meetings before 1928, despite extensive research.

\(^{286}\) *The Geisha* (1920) programme.

\(^{287}\) The background of the committee members was gleaned from a variety of newspaper sources.

\(^{288}\) Mitchell had been a child performer with the Australian Pollard Company. Her husband was eventually knighted, became mayor of Auckland from 1935 to 1941 and president of the society in 1939.
which included set and costume design, photography and stage management. Mrs Archdale Tayler and her husband had been two regular performers in the Auckland Amateur Opera Club. Harry Goldie not only owned a substantial milling business but also was the son of David Goldie, who had been mayor of Auckland from 1898 to 1901. Roger Fenton, a businessman and musician, was the son of Francis Dart Fenton.

Another aspect which reinforced the air of elitism was the fact that many of the committee members and performers lived in the more affluent outlying suburbs. For instance, the veteran performer Ethel Rae lived in the leafy eastern suburb of Remuera, whereas the ballet teachers Beryl Nettleton and Bettina Edwards resided in Northcote on the North Shore. Although the Grafton Road area was a desirable residential suburb, wealthier citizens were moving to larger estates on the fringes of Auckland.

Strict rules governed applications for membership, as set out in rules seven to eleven. There were three classes of membership: active, subscribing and life. Anyone could apply for the first two categories, but a life membership could be awarded only to certain persons who had “rendered special services to the Society or to the cause of arts of opera, drama, music or ballet”.\textsuperscript{289} Application for membership entailed a laborious process. First, a prospective member was required to arrange an interview with the secretary of the society; second, if the prospective member could convince the secretary at the interview that he or she was a suitable candidate, the applicant’s name would be placed before the committee; third, a vote would be taken by the committee to decide whether the person was of good repute and thus eligible for membership. The price of subscriptions and tickets, nevertheless, would have effectively eliminated those on lower incomes. In 1928, for instance, the minimum annual subscription was ten shillings and sixpence, which entitled a subscriber to two seats for a musical.\textsuperscript{290} Yet, a subscriber could pay as much as one guinea for a seat.

Those who were accepted as subscribing members but wished to qualify for a role in the productions were required to undergo a voice test audition. This was done in the presence of a subcommittee headed by Colin Muston, who was the musical director as well as a distinguished violinist and teacher. A voice test was essential as the society prided itself on the high standard of its singing.\textsuperscript{291} Moreover, much of the repertoire required an operatic style of singing, sometimes in two-part harmony or more. It was

\textsuperscript{289} Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, rule 7.
\textsuperscript{290} The Belle of New York production account 29 September 1928. These are the earliest financial records that it has been possible to trace.
\textsuperscript{291} In this era, singing was paramount. There would come a time when dance would become the focal point.
noted in the 1928 minutes, for instance, that although the “tenors Messrs W. H. Sleep and A. G. Badley” had been accepted by the subcommittee, which rendered them eligible to sing in a production, they were required to re-audition for specific roles.

Financial viability, including the ownership of assets, was also of great importance. This was reflected in the fact that early in its history the society purchased its own premises. Two members of the society, Leonard P. Leary, a lawyer who was on the committee, and Eric Waters, a professional musician, wrote *Tutankhamen* (1923), a musical which proved both artistically and financially successful. The profits enabled the society to place a deposit on the premises at 33 Grafton Road, which had been hired for rehearsals over the years. A portion of the profits was also donated to the War Memorial Fund, in keeping with the ethos of the society as a community-minded organisation.

As well as being used for rehearsals the Hall provided a source of income: it was rented to organisations such as the Little Theatre Society, the Shakespearian Society and the Philistine Social Club, and for private social functions. The society endeavoured to promote a high-class image which included diligent maintenance of its premises. Nevertheless, some activities were considered to be less than respectable, judging by the reactions of one neighbour, Mr Samuel Jacobs, businessman and owner of the Dominion Novelty Company, who lived next door at 31 Grafton Road.

Copies of correspondence from 1926 to 1929 record an ongoing battle between the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society and Jacobs, who believed that the standard of behaviour at functions held in the Hall bordered on debauchery. This is evidenced by his many letters of complaint to the Auckland City Council. An excerpt from a letter dated 23 August 1926 to the mayor and councillors, reads:

> To: His Worship The Mayor & Councillors: Gentlemen – I have to bring under your notice a matter which I have endured since the hall situated next to my property 31 Grafton Road has become a dancing hall and other such functions. I have made no complaint before, thinking that as time went on they would modulate themselves. The Rowdy [sic] element is due I presume to drink being consumed on the premises. I could not let the goings on that took place on Friday night the 20th inst. pass without bringing this matter before your notice. The disgraceful conduct was such that had I a phone in my house I certainly would have rang [sic] up the police. These disturbances are often carried on into the early hours of the morning which my neighbours can testify to. The hall is sublet to various people nearly every night in the week not being particular whether it is Sunday included. . . . Yours Respectfully, Samuel Jacobs.

The town clerk immediately contacted the society for comment. On 6 September 1926 the society replied that as the Hall was hired to outside organisations on occasions, the

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292 Committee minutes, 30 August 1928, which are the first minutes it has been possible to trace.
293 *Tutankhamen* will be discussed in more detail in the repertoire section of this chapter.
294 Auckland City Council Archives.
complaint would be investigated. Nevertheless, the battle between Jacobs and the society continued. A letter from Jacobs to the mayor and councillors dated 21 April 1928 states:

Dear Sir, Pardon me for troubling you again. In your letter of Oct. last you wished me to let you know if there is any further annoyance from the Hall 33 Grafton Road. I am sorry to say that I could not let last night (the 20th) affair pass without writing you. It was nothing more or less than a drunken orgie kept us until after midnight. I cannot express myself of the dreadful goings on. The hall was occupied by the staff and friends of the National Bank and the lady caretaker living alongside approached them regards their conduct and they abused her. The language was disgusting. … Samuel Jacobs.

A further exchange of letters between the council and the society confirms that the latter was taking steps to alleviate the problem. Harry Goldie, honorary secretary of the society, interviewed various neighbours who lived in close proximity to the Hall, in a bid to establish the veracity of Jacobs’ claims. It transpired that Jacobs had exaggerated both the alleged debauchery and the level of noise emanating from functions in the Hall, in an effort to induce council to evict the society. Subsequently, an excerpt from a letter dated 21 August 1928 from Harry Goldie to the town clerk reads:

Dear Sir, Your further letter to hand re complaint of conduct of people using the Society’s hall, Grafton Road. I am strongly of the opinion that Jacobs is working up a conspiracy to try and get us out of our hall – so many of his complaints, when investigated by us, are flatly contradicted by our tenants. … about ten days after this interview Mrs. Jacobs repudiated all she had previously stated and said there had been noise and offered no excuse for her attitude; by this time it was too late for me to approach our tenants, however, this I did and have now a complete refutation from her of any disturbance or noise – a copy of which I enclose. My Committee, in view of the fact that Mr. Jacobs seems to be going beyond bounds with his complaints, has decided that its caretaker shall be in attendance at all functions held in the Hall and has strict instructions to see that no undue noise is made and that the hall is vacated at midnight … . H. Goldie, Hon. Sec.

There is no further mention in the minutes of meetings, or any additional letters in the Auckland City Council Archives, in regard to complaints from neighbours.

Civic Pride, the Great Depression and the Auckland Light Opera Club

By 1928 the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society had established a lucrative hireage service. Costumes and scenery had been hired to the following amateur operatic societies throughout New Zealand: Hamilton, Napier, Gisborne and Eltham in the North Island; and Blenheim, Christchurch and Invercargill in the South Island. This implied that other societies were performing a similar repertoire to that of the operatic society. The chairman reiterated that the efforts of the society were in the interests of the citizens of Auckland both from an entertainment and financial standpoint, and that “the assets of the society are earmarked and secured for the City’s eventual benefit”. He confirmed that no active member received any remuneration.

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295 Committee minutes, 30 August 1928.
296 Annual report, 18 April 1929.
Following the success of *The Belle of New York* (1928), the society decided to place itself on a more professional footing by employing a paid secretary. After much discussion it was agreed that “W. J. A. Thompson and Major Redmond” respectively be employed as secretary and assistant secretary, subject to re-appointment if they proved satisfactory. Thompson was paid £50 per annum, which included the use of a room for meetings and a telephone for twelve months. Redmond’s remuneration was “£25 per annum with a commission of twenty five per cent on all gross leasings and hirings of the society’s Hall, scenery, props and costumes”, but was not to exceed £400 per annum. 297 The society was able also to repay the remaining mortgage on its Grafton Road premises in 1928. 298 As the twenty-one year lease on the premises was due for renewal in six years’ time, the committee established a fund for the expected increase in rental. 299

However, 1929 and the ensuing years proved difficult financially in the wake of the New York stockmarket crash. In 1932 during the Great Depression, the society approached the bank for a £100 overdraft to assist cash flow over the following four months. The bank, however, declined as it was not prepared to advance against leasehold property. 300 Therefore, in an attempt to raise funds, the society reduced Hall hireage costs for outside organisations, but this strategy was not an unmitigated success: venues with superior facilities, including St Andrews Church Hall which was on the main tramline in Symonds Street, were now available.

In April 1932, riots took place in Queen Street as angry people demonstrated against the wage-cutback policies of the coalition government. The shortage of revenue had a major impact on the society, which was reflected in the inability of some members to pay their annual subscriptions. One member, for example, was forced to move to Wellington to seek employment because the Auckland firm for which she worked had been unable to pay her wages for some months. The subscription payment for another member was waived:

In view of the fact that Mr Stephenson was unable to pay his subscription owing to being unemployed at the present time, we make him a donation of 10/6 for special work done in connection with the duplicating of the vocal scores and that this amount be credited to his subscription for the current year.” 301

Stephenson’s efforts serve as a reminder of the volunteer work performed by members, a contributing factor to the survival of the society.

297 Committee minutes, 12 June 1929. Thompson and Redmond were replaced by W. Laird Thomson three years later.  
298 Committee minutes, 17 October 1928.  
299 Committee minutes, 2 November 1928.  
300 Committee minutes, 24 February 1932.  
301 Committee minutes, 21 July 1932.
In 1936, it was noted in the minutes that a rival operatic society had been formed. The name of the society was the Auckland Light Opera Club, and it would become a worthy competitor after World War II. Members of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society were advised that they could not belong to both societies.

The Call to Arms

The year of 1939 brought a raft of problems. As a loyal member of the Dominion, New Zealand answered England’s patriotic call to arms when World War II was declared. Many members of the society joined the armed forces. The managing secretary, W. Laird Thomson, sailed with the first echelon of the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force. As a tribute to the serving members, the society included a Roll of Honour in its programmes for the duration of the war. The following example is taken from the *Merrie England* (1939) programme (figure 18).

![Roll of Honour](image)

The dwindling number of male performers affected the choice of repertoire and depleted the committee. Nevertheless, many people who provided essential services were not permitted to join the armed forces, a decree issued by central government. One such person was Roland Everard, a member of the society who worked as an electrical engineer at the Auckland Council. He was keen to serve in World War II, but his enlistment was opposed by the Mayor of Auckland. Everard was a notable performer, and served on the Hall committee by providing his electrical expertise free of charge.

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302 Committee minutes, 5 August 1936.
303 Annual report, 20 February 1940.
304 Telephone interview with Roland Everard, 26 June 2007.
During 1941, the Crown requested the use of the Grafton Road Hall for the manufacture of optical munitions by the Army for the duration of the war. A meeting was subsequently arranged between representatives of the society and the Crown to discuss the terms and conditions. The society agreed to continue to pay the ground rent, repairs, maintenance and existing insurance. In return, the Crown allowed the society to use the stage and the shed behind the Hall for the storage of properties. However, members were required to have written permission from the chairman or secretary of the society before they could enter the building. The Crown would have the use of the Hall and garage at a rental of £3/5/- per week plus rates. They undertook also to pay for the telephone rental, lighting, heating, water, gas and crockery breakages. The Crown undertook to restore the Hall to its original condition at the termination of the tenancy at the end of the war.

In 1942, the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society did not stage a musical, but there was an “off-stage show” of a more serious nature in the form of the arrival of American troops in June 1942 to defend New Zealand from a potential Japanese invasion after the latter’s attack on Darwin, Australia. The troops were greeted with great fanfare: locals crowded on to the wharves while military bands played music. This was the first substantial landing of foreign troops in New Zealand since the British regiments had left in 1870. Until June 1944, between 15,000 and 45,000 American troops were stationed in Auckland and Wellington. The population of New Zealand at the time was only 1.6 million.

The society, however, did stage productions in 1943. As the Hall was not available for rehearsals, members offered their homes and other venues. For instance, audition readings and rehearsals were held during the daytime at the apartment of foundation member, Mr Gordon Fagan, whose residence was within walking distance of the Hall. Fagan was a well known singing teacher. On the other hand, Miss Beryl Nettleton allowed the society to use her ballet studio in Swanson Street for evening rehearsals. Thus, the

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305 Annual report, 31 March 1942.
306 Managing secretary, Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, personal communication to district engineer, Publics Works Department, 2 April 1942.
307 Public Works Department, personal communication to the society, 17 April 1942, confirms that the accommodation was required “for the Scientific & Industrial Research Department” for Professor Burbridge and his staff.
309 As many New Zealand men were serving overseas, the American servicemen provided a welcome boost to the male population at venues such as dance halls.
society continued to provide entertainment for the city of Auckland, albeit under wartime conditions.

**The Repertoire 1919 to 1945**

The repertoire of the society clearly shows the strong influence of works from Europe, Great Britain and America (table 3).

Table 3 Auckland Amateur Operatic Society repertoire from 1919 to 1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Composer and Lyricist</th>
<th>National Origin</th>
<th>World Premiere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>The Gondoliers</td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>The Geisha</td>
<td>Jones/Greenbank</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>A Country Girl</td>
<td>Monckton/Rubens/Ross/Greenbank</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Our Miss Gibbs</td>
<td>Caryll/Monckton/Ross/Greenbank</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Tutankhamen</td>
<td>Waters/Leary</td>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Tutankhamen</td>
<td>Waters/Leary</td>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>San Toy</td>
<td>Jones/Monckton/Ross/Greenbank</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>The Abbess of Whitby</td>
<td>Waters/Leary</td>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>The Arcadians</td>
<td>Monckton/Talbot/Wimperis</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>La Mascotte</td>
<td>Audran/Duru/Chivot</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>The Belle of New York</td>
<td>Kerker/Morton</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Florodora</td>
<td>Stuart/Boyd-Jones/Rubens</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Birrell O’Malley Concert</td>
<td>List of items not available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Tutankhamen</td>
<td>Waters/Leary</td>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>A Greek Slave</td>
<td>Jones/Monckton/Greenbank/Ross</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>no productions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Les Cloches de Corneville</td>
<td>Planquette/Clairville/Gabet/</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>The Belle of New York</td>
<td>Kerker/Morton</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>A Runaway Girl</td>
<td>Monckton/Caryll/Hopwood/Greenbank</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>The New Moon</td>
<td>Romberg/Hammerstein II/Mandel/Schwab</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Kern/Bolton/Grey</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>The Vagabond King</td>
<td>Friml/Post/Hooker</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Rose Marie</td>
<td>Friml/Stothart/Harbach/Hammerstein II</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rowena Jackson Celebrity Entertainment</td>
<td>Only a summary of items has been included in the programme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Merrie England</td>
<td>German/Hood</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>no productions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>no productions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Les Cloches de Corneville</td>
<td>Planquette/Clairville/Gabet/</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Our Miss Gibbs</td>
<td>Caryll/Monckton/Ross/Greenbank</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Katinka</td>
<td>Friml/Hauerbach</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1915</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please refer to Appendix 6 for a detailed index of composers, lyricists, playwrights and authors.*

*The programme has been mislaid for this fundraiser for O’Malley’s overseas tuition.*

*This fundraiser for Jackson’s overseas tuition was presented in conjunction with the dancing teachers of Auckland. Items included a mixture of songs, dancing and skits.*

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**sources:** Auckland Music Theatre records
Of the 27 musicals, twelve (44%) originated in Great Britain. The four (15%) musicals which originated in France were English adaptations and reached Auckland through the London agent of the society. Only four (15%) New Zealand musicals were produced. Seven (26%) American musicals were mounted by the society in this era, the first one being *The Belle of New York* in 1928.

While the influence of Great Britain may have been perceived as the dominant force generally, changes were afoot. For instance, the cinema was helping to shape a progressively Americanised popular culture in New Zealand: 350 out of the 400 feature films screened in 1927 were made in America. The Charleston and American jazz music gained popularity, while women’s fashion began to be dominated by Hollywood glamour.

The minutes of meetings of the society prior to 1928 are not available, but the ones from 1928 to 1945 clearly show that musicals were chosen with regard to their perceived financial viability. Although *The Gondoliers* was the inaugural production, Gilbert and Sullivan’s operas are not noted in the minutes of the society as possible productions in this era. It could be argued that copyright issues were a problem, and that overseas professional companies were touring the productions throughout New Zealand. All the same, other New Zealand societies did mount Gilbert and Sullivan operas. The Blenheim Amateur Operatic Society staged *The Gondoliers* (1918), *The Mikado* (1919), *The Pirates of Penzance* (1923), *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1930) and *Trial by Jury* (1930). Wellington Operatic Society mounted *The Gondoliers* (1918) and *The Mikado* (1919). Wanganui Amateur Musical and Dramatic Society staged *The Pirates of Penzance* (1929) and *The Yeomen of the Guard* (1930). It is of interest, nevertheless, that Tom Pollard (1857-1922) of the famous theatrical family produced *The Gondoliers* for the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. Therefore, the society may have staged *The Gondoliers* simply because Pollard had financed it. Pollard was a generous benefactor to amateur societies throughout New Zealand until his death.

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314 The Auckland Amateur Operatic Society minutes from 1928 to 1947 refer to all musicals as either “operas” or “plays”, while the programmes vary. *The Arcadians* is labelled as “A Fantastic Musical Play”, *Florodora* as “Musical Comedy” and *The New Moon* “A Musical Romance”.
318 Tom Pollard was born Thomas John O’Sullivan in Tasmania. He studied music at James Joseph Pollard’s academy of music, and became a fulltime violinist in Pollard’s Liliputian juvenile comic opera company. He changed his surname to Pollard when he joined the family orchestra, and eventually married James Pollard’s daughter, Emily. After many years of touring New Zealand and Australia, the company
A comparison of the trends in the West End and on Broadway illustrates the great diversity that was evolving. Kurt Gänzl’s study of the West End points out that in 1919 most of the new musicals were British, but that the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan had lost favour. However, works such as *Chu Chin Chow*, *The Maid of the Mountains* and *The Lilac Domino* amongst others, were fashionable. Gänzl remarks that musicals based on French farce were also well-received, because British audiences long had had a penchant for that type of entertainment, whereas American musicals were not as popular. For example, new West End offerings included *Oh! Don’t, Dolly*, a musical farce in three acts adapted from *Betsy*, which, in turn, was based on the French farce *Bébé*. It must be remembered also that many of the West End and Broadway musicals at the time were vehicles for contemporary stars that often performed on both sides of the Atlantic. Consequently, the success of a production depended heavily on those performers.

According to Bordman, during 1919 revues flourished with shows such as *The Ziegfeld Follies of 1919*, followed by *Greenwich Village Follies* and the *Shubert Gaieties of 1919*. Shows with patriotic overtones such as *Hitchy-Koo* (1919), which featured two American Indian characters, with music by Cole Porter were also popular. It appears, therefore, that Broadway was dealing with contemporary issues whereas the West End appeared to be sheltering in the comfortable nostalgia of yesteryear. That is not to say that Broadway was necessarily dealing with reality but, rather, that it was living in the present and adopting a contemporary style with the inclusion of essentially American characters, as noted above.

Auckland, nonetheless, was a world away from the professional-theatre hub of the northern hemisphere but had its share of talented amateur performers, many of whom undertook tuition in singing, acting and dancing from well-qualified resident teachers. To a large extent, the choice of repertoire was governed by Williamson’s, which held the rights to theatrical productions. Therefore, if a production was being staged overseas by professionals the rights were not available to amateurs for many years, hence the sometimes extended time span between the premiere of a musical and its debut in Auckland.

Notwithstanding, however, that the rights monopoly excluded many of the musicals written by New Zealand composers, the society did not take advantage of local sources.

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320 Ibid., 33.
321 Ibid., 132-141.
With the exception of Tutankhamen and the Abbess of Whitby, neither of which had a New Zealand topic, locally-composed musicals did not feature in this era. Nevertheless, as migrants were still predominantly from the British Isles, which was reflected in the heritage of many New Zealanders, and given the marketing skills of Williamson’s, perhaps it is not surprising that musicals from Europe, Great Britain and America were of greater interest than those based on local culture. One of the reasons the society has survived is its proclivity for meeting audience expectations in its choice of repertoire, bearing in mind it is not always possible to gauge public reaction accurately. The overseas musicals selected by the society had proved financially successful in either the West End and/or on Broadway. Granted, box office success in the West End did not automatically ensure success on Broadway or vice versa.

An article which appeared in the Musical and Dramatic column (New Zealand Herald, 8 March 1919) served as a reminder of the decorum that ostensibly governed polite society in Auckland:

The tendency on the part of some musical-comedy and vaudeville artists to introduce vulgarity in dialogue or situation requires checking. Many a production, otherwise amusing enough, is utterly spoiled for people of refined tastes by this pernicious habit. … Playgoers are too tolerant. … If they would combine and take practical steps to abolish degrading features in public performances … much good would result.

Whether or not this reflected the general view of Aucklanders is debatable, but there is no doubt that the above comments reflected the philosophy of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society committee. Thus, the repertoire was in keeping with the strict sense of propriety that governed the rules of polite society: members could, in fact, be expelled for behaviour considered “injurious to the character or interest of the society”.

Large ensembles, or choruses, were also a key factor in the musicals selected by the operatic society, because they gave members an opportunity to hone their performing skills while observing the more experienced performers in the principal roles. Moreover, the bigger the cast, the greater would be the potential for profitable ticket sales. The Geisha lists fourteen women and eight men in the principal roles, as well as twenty-one women and seventeen men in the chorus, making a total of sixty singers. In addition, a troupe of dancers participated but, apart from the soloist, their names were not listed individually, making it difficult to estimate numbers accurately. A large chorus can, of course, increase production costs. However, chorus members in amateur theatre usually

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323 King, The Penguin History of New Zealand Illustrated, 318, comments that “Lord Jellicoe, the Governor-General, noted in 1924 that New Zealanders were extremely proud of their British nationality” and that they claimed “to be even more British than their kin of the Motherland”. Jellicoe was the patron of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society at the time.

324 Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, rule 9 (b).
pay for their own makeup, sometimes make their own costumes and provide their own footwear.\textsuperscript{325} Tutankhamen, which is discussed at a later stage, is a case in point.

\textit{Rose Marie} boasted one of the largest casts in the history of the operatic society with no fewer than 140 performers. As the individual names of the orchestra were not listed it was impossible to estimate numbers accurately, but the musicians were normally hired by the musical director and paid a fee. As His Majesty’s Theatre seated approximately 800 persons, it was advantageous to have a large cast that could sell tickets to family and friends.

The first four years of operation from 1919 to 1922, featured musicals which dealt with the common theme of the difficulties associated with marrying out of one’s class and/or race. That theme may have had some relevance to the lifestyle and class structure of Auckland society, but the non-threatening and glamorous style of the musicals would have provided light-hearted entertainment after the harsh reality of World War I. Moreover, while the American musical would eventually gain a high profile in the repertoire of the society, the chosen productions would not have strongly patriotic American overtones.

\textbf{1919 and the 1920s}

The inaugural production of the society, Gilbert and Sullivan’s twelfth opera, \textit{The Gondoliers} (1919), satirised the monarchy and nobility of England. Although financial records are not available, it is assumed that the production made a profit as the society staged a musical in 1920 and beyond. A cast list, with the names of the producer and musical director, is filed in the archives of Auckland Music Theatre, but it was not possible to locate the programme. (In fact, the first programme it was possible to locate is \textit{The Geisha}.)

In addition, there is a selection of archival sepia photographs bound in a brown leather concertina file with the name of the musical and the initials “W. J. C.” embossed in gold on the front. The photographs were probably taken by William J. Crowther, an active member of the society whose talents included photography. The costumes revealed painstaking attention to detail: intricate embroidery, beading, sequins and lace cuffs, as well as elaborate accessories including impressive wigs.

Two photographs of the Duke and Duchess of Plaza-Toro illustrate the high standard of costuming (plate 4).

\textsuperscript{325} The minutes of the society confirm this. It has been also the personal experience of the author.
It is unclear whether the costumes were sewn by cast members, tailored by costumiers or, perhaps, hired from Tom Pollard. In *Tutankhamen* (1923), for example, members of the chorus sewed their own costumes, which were designed by W. J. Crowther.  

*The Geisha* (1920) was produced by W. J. Crowther. A “snapshot” of the production is provided by the front cover of the programme and an exquisite photograph of the leading lady (plates 5 and 6).


327 Until 1970, the programmes of the society reveal that the person directing the show was called the “producer”. Since 1971, the term “director” has been used, with the society cited as the producer.
There is no documentation to confirm whether the background was specially decorated for plate 6 or whether the photograph was taken on the set. All programmes for shows staged at His Majesty’s Theatre were required to be submitted to Williamson’s for approval prior to printing.³²⁸ Normal procedure, as shown in plate 5, was for the front cover to feature the name of the musical, the date of the opening performance and the citation “His Majesty’s Theatre, Lessees, J. C Williamson’s Ltd”. In ensuing years, Williamson’s name appeared also above the cast list in the centre of the programme. Plate 5 shows the name of the society as “Auckland Amateur Opera Society” rather than “Auckland Amateur Operatic Society”. However, as it is clear from the records of the society that the latter name is correct, there may have been a printing error. The notation “7 performances” is written by hand, probably by the original owner of the programme.

Thirty-one firms advertised their services in the programme.³²⁹ One of the main advertisers was Lewis R. Eady & Son, Ltd, which offered patrons the opportunity of purchasing The Geisha vocal score and listening to songs on the “gramaphone” [sic] in-store.³³⁰ Another advertiser was “Pullan Armitage & Co. Ltd, Royal Garage, Albert St”, which provided excellent parking only “two minutes from Theatre”.³³¹

The Geisha is set in an exotic location and described in the programme as “the World-Famed Japanese Opera”, but whether it is an opera is debatable. It does reinforce, however, that terminology has changed over the years. According to Mander and Mitchenson The Geisha is, in fact, a “musical play”, a term that was invented to describe this musical when it premiered in 1896:

Whereas musical comedy had a slight farcical plot developed by the comedians and light singers, individual dancers and, of course, the girls, the musical play was built round a romantic plot of some substance, with a leading singer of ability appropriately supported by principals and chorus, the comedy being supplied by a comedian and a soubrette kept within bounds by the exigencies of the plot.³³²

The story deals with the infatuation of an English naval officer Lieutenant Reggie Fairfax, with O Mimosa San, the beautiful and talented head geisha of the Japanese Tea House of Ten Thousand Joys. Eventually, Mimosa marries a Japanese captain who has long loved

³²⁸ Since the demise of Williamson’s, programmes have been submitted for approval to the various copyright holders of musicals.
³²⁹ A range of items was advertised: British home-made cakes, Highlander Milk, Butterfly Tea, ladies fashion, clothes cleaning, oriental art, pianos and organs, wallpaper, paint, motor cars and the Remington Commercial College for girls.
³³⁰ The Geisha programme back cover. The Eady Family had been associated with the Auckland Amateur Opera Club and continued to sponsor the operatic society in the 1990s.
³³¹ The Geisha programme, 3.
her and the situation is resolved happily in keeping with the era when it was not socially acceptable to marry out of one’s race or social class.

*A Country Girl* (1921) and *Our Miss Gibbs* (1922), two musical comedies which premiered in London in 1902 and 1909 respectively, also deal with the problems of marrying out of one’s class. Not only are both musicals set in England, but also the heroines are working-class country girls who are adventurous enough to journey to London to pursue their career goals. Both Marjorie Joy in *A Country Girl* and Mary Gibbs in *Our Miss Gibbs* respectively, realise their career ambitions and marry men who rank above them socially. The themes in those musicals seem to reflect the slowly-changing times, especially in England.

A photograph of the set for *Our Miss Gibbs* (1922) shows the elegant interior of a realistic-looking exclusive department store, flanked by fluted columns on either side of the stage with ornamental cornices, a mullioned window at the rear towards stage right, vases with flowers, and a huge ornamental peacock in the centre (plate 7). Two upholstered benches add a touch of charming intimacy.

On the other hand, a photograph of the grand finale with more than sixty people on stage features a painted backcloth of buildings which are strongly reminiscent of London’s historical landmarks such as St Paul’s Cathedral. Miss Mary Gibbs, the heroine of the

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333 Although the programme of *A Country Girl* does not specify the type of musical, and the *Our Miss Gibbs* programme describes the show as “a musical comedy” Gänzl classifies both works as “musical plays” in The British Musical Theatre, Vol. I, 809 and 1039.
musical, is a shop assistant at Garrods Department Store. All aspects of *Our Miss Gibbs*, including the costumes and the scenery, were praised by the critics (*New Zealand Herald*, 24 November 1922): “The piece was admirably mounted and costumed, so that the spectacular effects were assured of recognition”. The musical was produced by Theo Trezise.

*Tutankhamen* (1923) was a milestone. It was the first time the society had staged a musical written by New Zealanders and, more importantly, it had been written by two members. The society may have been attempting to establish a sense of identity by mounting a New Zealand musical. Equally, however, the decision may have been a commercial one in that the society would not have had to pay a copyright fee to Williamson’s. Moreover, the topic was a contemporary one of historical interest: Leary and Waters based their musical on the events of 4 November 1922 when Howard Carter discovered the tomb of the ancient Pharaoh Tutankhamen.

It seems, however, that the society did not anticipate the high level of interest that the musical would generate. Although the minutes of the society prior to 1928 could not be located, the original 1923 programme was revealing: it was extremely plain with more space devoted to advertisers and sponsors than to the production. The lyrics of the “Song of Tutankhamen” were included but, in keeping with the era, photographs of the performers and sets were not. William Crowther, a committee member, was costumier, photographer and stage manager.

The musical proved a huge success with the original six-night season in His Majesty’s Theatre being extended by three nights. The newspaper review (*Auckland Star*, 17 September 1923) invited favourable comparison with professional theatre:

> It would have taken some self-assurance to suggest that an Auckland piece done by amateurs would have been one of the successes of the 1923 season . . . so good was the show that at times one had to look at the programme to make sure it really was the work of our own amateurs. *Tut-ankh-amen* is the most spectacular thing the Society has ever attempted, and some of the scenes and dresses would compare with anything that Williamson’s could put on.

Basking in the glory of its success, the society mounted the musical for a further season of six nights, from 24 to 30 January 1924, amid great fanfare. In honour of the occasion a special souvenir programme was printed in green and gold, featuring sepia photographs of the performers and the lyrics of two songs, “Song of Seti – The Mirage” and the “Song of Tutankhamen”. Some of the lyrics were included in the souvenir programme, for example, “Song of Tutankhamen” (figure 19).

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334 As noted in Lowerson, *Amateur Operatics*, 95, “Garrods” was a combination of “Harrods” in London and a popular but now defunct store called “Gamleys”.

335 *Tutankhamen* souvenir programme, 6.
It is difficult to ascertain whether Leary or Waters wrote the lyrics. Leary is credited as the “Author and Producer” of *Tutankhamen*, whereas Waters is credited as the “Musical Director and Composer of Original Numbers”. However, the word “composer” is normally associated with music rather than lyrics. The usual high standard of workmanship in costuming is evident from a group photograph featuring Tutankhamen with his court (plate 8).

As it transpired, *Tutankhamen* would leave a lifelong impression on a small boy called Vivian Jacobs, who was in the audience. Indeed, it would affect the path of his life. Jacobs, who was interviewed by the author as part of research for this thesis, and who played a key role in shaping the history of amateur theatre in Auckland, remarked:
The first time I went to the theatre was to see the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society production of *Tutankhamen* and I saw a boy onstage who was about the same age as I was. I don’t know what prompted it, but I thought if he could get on stage, so could I. . . . There’s not much I can remember about the production except that a pack of American tourists were visiting Tutankhamen’s grave. One of them picked up what looked like a dried apricot, put it into his mouth and was taken back to Tutankhamen’s time. . . . I would say my theatrical career commenced in 1936 when, as an eighteen-year old, I auditioned for the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. 

Jacobs became a stalwart of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, answered the call to arms for World War II, and returned in the 1940s to once more participate in operatic society productions. This culminated with *Iolanthe*, which he produced. In 1960 Jacobs set up a rival society called Theatre Arts.

*San Toy* (1924), produced by Mrs Hume, and billed as a “Chinese Musical Comedy”, was again an exotic offering along the tried and true lines of *The Geisha*. In 1925 the society produced a second musical composed by Leary and Waters. It was called the *Abbess of Whitby*, based on a true story set in Northumbria, England in the seventh century AD. Again, the topic was not a local one. Rather, there seemed to be a desire to retain a link with the “homeland”.

Despite much advance publicity, the musical was not well-received: audiences were shocked by the macabre topic. Based on the success of *Tutankhamen*, which was written by locals, the society may have considered that the *Abbess of Whitby* would follow suit. Newspapers reviews varied from high praise to utter condemnation of the topic. One review (*New Zealand Herald*, 16 November 1925), nonetheless, seemed to reflect public reaction:

> It is undoubtedly an unusual kind of play – by no means ‘highbrow’ – but vastly removed from the cheap and flimsy musical-comedies that infest the professional stage today. . . . It might have been all historically ‘correct’ but the average playgoer does not like it. Neither is it pleasant to sit through the gruesome details of such a song as ‘Faggots’, and be urged to watch a woman writhing in torment at the stake. If the author imagined the play needed strengthening by a resort to naked realism of the revolting kind he has used, it would seem to be rather a confession of failure. . . .

Letters of protest from the general public were sent to the editor (*New Zealand Herald*, 19 November 1925) complaining of the chilling spectacle of Ethel Rae, who was extremely convincing in the role of the Abbess, grasping what appeared to be a burning brazier and then screaming. All in all, some of the scenes were too realistic for audiences who were accustomed to musicals which featured an element of glamour and culminated in happy endings. After the fiasco with the *Abbess of Whitby* the society hastily reverted to the older type of exotic musical, in order not to alienate its audiences. Consequently, *The Arcadians*, a musical play featuring a fantasy world with shepherds and shepherdesses,

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337 *San Toy* programme.
338 Letter to the editor from Mr S. Barryman, for example.
was followed by *La Mascotte* an opera-comique set in the imaginary Principality of Piombino.

However, in 1928 the society once more ventured into new territory by mounting its first American show, *The Belle of New York*, a musical comedy. The society decided to establish its own amateur orchestra for the musical. Consequently, the orchestra had been practising in the Hall for some weeks. Varying opinions on their level of competence were expressed by committee members: Mr Plummer considered that the musicians were inept, while Mr Jackson felt that several of the players were proficient.\(^{339}\) Jackson commented that Colin Muston’s professional orchestra, which normally played for musicals, did not practice enough. Thus, their rendition on the first two nights was always unsatisfactory. The matter was settled by Muston who stated that inexperienced players would find it difficult to read the music because it was in manuscript form. It appears that the amateur orchestra continued practising, but Muston’s orchestra was used for the musical.

The marketing campaign was intense: slide shows were screened during picture-show intervals in the New Regent, Majestic, Strand and St James theatres; the chorus rendition of the act one finale was broadcast on 1YA; advertisements appeared in the *New Zealand Herald* and *Auckland Star*; posters were emblazoned on the sides of sixty trams travelling throughout Auckland; and photographs were displayed in various Queen Street stores.\(^{340}\) Despite the practical shortcomings of the orchestra, the tuneful music, humour, vitality and glamorous setting in New York provided a winning combination, with newspaper reviews comparing *The Belle of New York* favourably with professional productions.

**The 1930s**

The decision to revive *Tutankhamen* (1930) was based on economic considerations:

In deciding to stage a revival of *Tutankhamen*, . . . your Executive felt that, in view of the then existing economic conditions and the depressing effect that competition from the “Talkies” had had upon the legitimate stage generally, it must endeavour to produce a play that could be counted upon not to entail a financial loss to the Society, and reference to the Balance Sheet herewith demonstrates the success of the production in this direction”.\(^{341}\)

Following the success of the *Tutankhamen* revival, the secretary was instructed to write to the New Zealand composer, Alfred Hill, concerning the possibility of staging a musical of

\(^{339}\) Committee minutes, 30 August 1928.

\(^{340}\) Committee minutes, 14 September 1928.

\(^{341}\) Ibid. The musical was hired by the Wellington Operatic Society in 1931. After this time, the script and score of *Tutankhamen* were lost.
local origin in 1931. Hill replied, suggesting the society could stage his opera Marama which had a Maori theme. After much discussion, the committee declined: because of the depressed state of the economy it was considered less of a financial risk to stage a familiar overseas musical. By this time, Hill was a well known composer but, judging from the minutes, the committee of the society considered that musicals from overseas were more acceptable to the general public. This indicates that while there was a growing sense of local identity in the society, it may have been coupled with a sense of nervousness in view of the failure of the Abbess of Whitby.

Consequently, the committee cabled Williamson’s to enquire whether A Greek Slave, Sunshine Girl or Veronique were available. Ultimately, A Greek Slave (1931), a “musical extravaganza” featuring a haughty Roman princess who was a relative of Caesar, was staged and proved financially successful. It was produced by Theo Trezise. An excerpt from the pre-show publicity (Sporting and Dramatic Review, 22 October 1931) reads:

The Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, which has always been noted for its successful productions, is again to the fore this year with a huge London success, “A Greek Slave”. Mr. Len Keven, who has a record of being one of the earliest active members of the Society, has a fine role to portray in the character of “Marcus Pompious”, Prefect of Rome. . . . He possesses a cultured baritone voice, having studied in London under Fraser Gange, the famous Scottish baritone, also Professor Davies and Professor Dent, of the Cambridge University. Both in London and Paris, Mr. Keven fulfilled many concert engagements.

The above preview reinforces the importance placed by the society on overseas education and experience, with London having particular cachet.

Nevertheless Auckland, in common with the rest of New Zealand and other parts of the world, began to feel the effects of the Great Depression. In 1932, the society did not mount a production because of the financial downturn in the economy. Instead, the production committee was asked to investigate the possibility of staging small entertainments for members. As a result, several concerts were mounted in the Hall as part of bridge evenings. They proved financially successful.

In 1933, Les Cloches de Corneville, a comic opera, was mounted in His Majesty’s Theatre. The rationale for choosing this outmoded show was based on financial considerations: royalties were no longer payable and Colin Muston was prepared to act as musical director without a pre-arranged fee. In addition, to save money, scenery in

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342 Committee minutes, 15 April 1930.
343 Committee minutes, 2 June 1930.
344 Committee minutes, 3 February 1932.
345 Production committee minutes, 5 July 1932.
storage could be rebuilt and costumes from wardrobe could be redesigned and refurbished. For similar reasons, *The Belle of New York* was revived in 1934 and made a profit.

The musical comedy *A Runaway Girl*, produced by Major Lampen, was chosen as the musical in 1935. However, a casting problem arose in regard to the leading female role. At a committee meeting, several members deemed that the veteran performer Miss Ethel Rae, rather than the younger Antonia Martinengo, should play the role of Carmenita, provided it was not necessary for the role to be sung. Although this seems odd in retrospect, it was evident from the Auckland Music Theatre archives that Ethel Rae had been a longstanding, active member of the society who was serving on the committee. The meeting was adjourned for two hours while members analysed the role of Carmenita. When the meeting reconvened, it was agreed that the role did need to be sung, and Antonia Martinengo was cast as Carmenita. Rae was cast in the mature role of Lady Coodle. The programme featured several photographs of the cast, including a middle-aged Rae, but none of the leading lady. The musical was not well-patronised and resulted in a deficit of £41/9/8.

In 1936, the society decided to stage *The New Moon*, a musical romance, which had premiered only nine years previously in New York. The committee was convinced that the tuneful music would appeal to Auckland audiences, and this proved to be the case. Not only did active membership applications increase, particularly from male singers, but also there was great support from the general public which resulted in a record profit. Vivian Jacobs, who debuted in the chorus of the show, commented on the professionalism of the producer, Stan Lawson, and the choreographer, Rosetta Powell, an Australian. He remembered Lawson as an extremely creative producer who chain-smoked and always dressed in an overcoat and trilby hat. Jacobs paid tribute to English-born Colin Muston as “a fantastic musical director, a real old Victorian gentleman with a waxed moustache and a stiff collar” who had a sense of humour.

The “Gorgeous Alexander” ballet was one of the highlights of *The New Moon* (plate 9).

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347 Committee minutes, 20 September 1934.
348 A *Runaway Girl* production account, 31 March 1936.
349 Annual report, 18 March 1937.
351 Ibid.
At first glance it seems that both male and female dancers performed the number. However, that was not the case. Jacobs explained:

I remember there was a half-and-half ballet for the song “Gorgeous Alexander” in *New Moon* with the dancers dressed as half girl and half boy side on to the audience. The dancers wore a half mob cap on one side of the head and a half tricorn on the other, which made the whole dance look as if there were boys and girls dancing. It was very clever.  

Jacobs commented on the difficulty of attaining a standard high enough to pass the audition to perform in a show, and the strict discipline that was enforced at rehearsals in the 1930s and 1940s. He pointed out that, consequently, there was much prestige attached to performing in the musicals of the society: it was perceived as mixing in the “right circles”.

An American musical comedy called *Sally* (1937), produced by Beryl Nettleton, followed. The show was advertised as a new type of venture for the society because dancing, rather than singing, was the main feature. Consequently, a dancer was cast in the leading role. *Sally* had been chosen because of the difficulty of gaining rights to other productions that the committee considered would appeal to audiences. Although the newspaper reviews were favourable and it seems that the production values were superior, the profits were markedly less than for *The New Moon*. In retrospect, the committee acknowledged that there had been insufficient ensemble singing. However, *Sally* did foreshadow the importance of dance, which would be a major feature in future decades.

The romantic musical play *The Vagabond King* (1938) proved a financial and artistic success with several complimentary letters being received from the general public.

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352 Personal interview with Vivian Jacobs, 23 June 2007.
353 Annual report, 24 January 1938.
public.\textsuperscript{354} The committee recorded its appreciation to the many volunteers who had built the scenery, made the stage properties, sewed the ballet costumes and thus had assisted in reducing the overall costs. Moreover, both the Dunedin Operatic and Dramatic Society and the Hamilton Amateur Operatic Society wished to hire the scenery, which was a positive financial outcome. Nevertheless, it was becoming increasingly difficult to mount productions which were reasonably modern, but had sufficient appeal to attract new members and audiences. Trends showed that the general public now preferred an evening in the cinema to an evening of live theatre.\textsuperscript{355}

Another American musical comedy \textit{Rose Marie} (1939), was produced by Stan Lawson, and featured the famous Totem Pole Ballet. It was staged at His Majesty’s Theatre after some problems with gaining the performing rights. The operatic society had obtained the rights from Samuel French Ltd in London through their New Zealand Agents, Aspinall and Joel. However, when they requested scripts from Williamson’s, the latter cabled the response, “We hold all performing rights “ROSE MARIE”. Who gave you permission?\textsuperscript{356} The chairman and secretary resolved the matter with Williamson’s.\textsuperscript{357}

The society proudly announced that it was the first time \textit{Rose Marie} had been staged by amateurs in the southern hemisphere. The Totem Pole Ballet was the highlight of the production. Only seventeen dancers are listed in the programme, but a head count of the dancers in a photograph suggests more than thirty (plate 10).
The music shop, Lewis Eady Limited, placed an advertisement in the *Rose Marie* programme stating that “sheet music and records” from the show could be purchased from their store.\(^{358}\) Unfortunately, the musical did not make a profit because of heavy expenses. It was considered, however, that the loss of £279 could eventually be recouped by hiring out the scenery and costumes.\(^{359}\)

During the rehearsals for *Rose Marie*, the young ballerina Rowena Jackson was invited to appear as guest solo dancer. In recognition of her talents, in September 1939 the society organised a fundraising concert for Jackson for ballet tuition in Australia.\(^{360}\) Five days after the concert, a special informal meeting of members was convened to discuss whether the society should go into recess during the war years. The committee strongly recommended that productions should continue because members would be called upon to present “entertainments for patriotic purposes”\(^{361}\). Everyone agreed, and a sub-committee was established to formulate an action plan. In the following years the society did raise funds for patriotic causes, in keeping with its community-minded ethos.

### The 1940s

Despite the departure of troops overseas to serve in World War II, centennial celebrations to mark British colonisation took place throughout New Zealand in 1940. An arts festival was organised by the Auckland Provincial Centennial Council under the chairmanship of Sir Ernest Davis, the mayor of Auckland and president of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. The festival music section was chaired by Mr C. B. Plummer, a committee member of the society.

The main feature was the opera *Faust* by Charles Gounod. Many members of the operatic society, including Vivian Jacobs, performed in the chorus which was trained by Colin Muston.\(^{362}\) Moreover, the scenery and costumes were made in Auckland under the auspices of the operatic society and used in the Wellington, Dunedin and Christchurch productions of the opera when it toured. Consequently, the input from the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society emphasised its eminent standing in the Auckland performing arts arena. Singers for the leading roles were imported from England: Marguerite, Isobel Baillie; Siebel, Gladys Ripley; Mephistopheles, Raymond Beatty; and Faust, Heddle

\(^{358}\) *Rose Marie* programme, 13.  
\(^{359}\) Annual report, 20 February 1940.  
\(^{360}\) Annual general meeting minutes, 20 February 1940. Jackson became an international star.  
\(^{361}\) Committee minutes, 14 September 1939.  
\(^{362}\) Centennial Music Festival Auckland 1940 programme, 11.
The musical director was Andersen Tyrer, who conducted the Centennial Festival Symphony Orchestra.

Formal dress for opening and closing night parties was normal protocol at this time. It added to the sense of occasion. The parties were enlivened by a sing-a-long around the piano, a tradition that continues into the new millennium. A photograph of the opening night party of *Faust* shows the guests in formal dress (plate 11).

In the Foreword of the Centennial Music Festival programme, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Peter Fraser, paid a glowing tribute to musical societies in Auckland:

Nations, like individuals, cannot live by bread alone, and we must strive always to keep the cultural life of our country on that same high level to which our material life has been raised. This can best be achieved by community effort such as is exemplified in the splendid manner in which the various Musical Societies of Auckland have, through your Committee, co-operated in the planning of the Centennial Music Celebrations in Auckland. 364

In a burst of World War II British patriotism, the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society staged *Merrie England* (1940). 365 Although the committee had expected the musical to be a financial success, this proved not to be the case. Moreover, it proved impossible to hire out the sets or costumes to other societies throughout New Zealand, owing to lack of interest. Indeed, the musicals which were popular reflected the desire of the general public to escape from the brutal reality of war into a realm of gentle nostalgia: *Les Cloches de Corneville* (1943) and *Our Miss Gibbs* (1944).

The society, however, did not ignore its wartime responsibilities. While it did not stage a production in its own right in 1941, the society presented *The Lilac Domino* in

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363 Committee minutes, 6 December 1939.
364 Centennial Music Festival Auckland 1940 programme, 3, 5.
365 Annual report, 27 March 1941.
conjunction with the Auckland Light Opera Club and the Lyric Harmonists Choir to raise money for overseas troops. The front cover of the programme notes that the musical was presented by “The Fighting Forces Fund Theatrical Committee”. However, the chairman of both that committee and the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society at the time was Mr H. S. Edwards. Moreover, there were several other members who were on both committees. Rehearsals were held in the Hall.

After combining with the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society to produce The Lilac Domino, the Auckland Light Opera Club produced its first musical in His Majesty’s Theatre: The Quaker Girl (1941). That was followed by A Country Girl (1943), The Belle of New York (1944) and The Arcadians (1944). Steered by Frank Poore, its founder and musical director, the opera club would become a formidable competitor in the ensuing decades.

A year after the departure of the American troops, and shortly after the end of World War II in September 1945, the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society staged the American musical comedy, Katinka, which was produced by Eva Moore. Here, an American named Thaddeus Hopper is instrumental in rescuing a virtuous young woman. At first glance it seems that the operatic society may have chosen Katinka because of the role the American troops had played in defending New Zealand. However, financial considerations appear to have been the overriding factor. Williamson’s representative had offered a discount of seven-and-a-half per cent on the hireage fee for the use of His Majesty’s Theatre if the society staged a show to which Williamson’s held the rights. The committee agreed.

The Katinka programme provides potted biographies of the various performers including their wartime achievements. Rex Sayers, who went on to become the chairman of the operatic society, played the role of Thaddeus Hopper. Sayers had served five years in the N.Z.E.F. During his war service, as producer-manager of the Kiwi Concert Party (Pacific) he organised numerous performances for the Allied troops in the South Pacific forward area. Mary Negus, who played the leading role of Katinka, had performed weekly for the Armed Forces with the Army Education Concert parties from 1943 to 1945. Mr A. R. Messenger, a member of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, had been appointed president of the newly-established Army Operatic Society and leased

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366 Committee minutes, 14 March and 11 April 1945. The society’s original choice had been The Maid of the Mountains but Williamson’s withdrew the rights despite the fact that all parts had been cast. Williamson’s then offered Katinka to the society.  
367 Katinka (1945) programme, 11.
the Hall for rehearsals at ten shillings per night. Meanwhile, W. Laird Thomson, the managing secretary of the society, returned from the war in readiness to resume his secretarial duties.

**Conclusion**

From 1919 to 1945 the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society formed an integral part of the life of Aucklanders, and made a worthy contribution to the cultural life of the community. In addition to staging musicals, the society raised funds for charity, organised social evenings for its members and made its Hall available for hire by outside organisations. The fact that the society was founded by a high-profile group of citizens with an interest in theatre seems to have created an air of elitism but, hand in hand with this, was the striving for excellence which was apparent in the high calibre of the productions. Indeed, many talented local performers honed their skills on the amateur musical theatre stage. Moreover, the sound business sense shown by the committee in the choice of musicals also contributed to its success. For instance, it was a prudent decision in 1932 to stage smaller shows in the Hall rather than mount a major production in His Majesty’s Theatre, as people were struggling financially owing to the Great Depression.

As the society prepared to step into the post-war era commencing in 1946, it reflected with satisfaction on its achievements over the past several years. Pleasingly, because the government optical munitions repository had departed, the society was able to move back into its own Grafton Road premises. A shed at the back of the Hall was rebuilt into a large wardrobe to house the costumes, and plans were afoot to build another structure to accommodate the scenery and properties. The society celebrated with a Christmas party in December in the newly-renovated Hall. There was some cause for rejoicing as several members of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society who had served in the war had returned safely in 1945.

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368 Committee minutes, 24 October 1945.
369 Annual report, 26 February 1946.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Consolidating Theatrical Traditions:
the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society 1946 to 1969

The Hall in Grafton Gully Post-war

In the aftermath of World War II, the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society recognised that it was necessary to review its policies and extend its sphere of influence in the arts in order to survive. Options included the setting up of a ballet company under the auspices of the society, sponsoring the Auckland Symphony Orchestra, staging plays and providing tuition in speech and drama. In a bid to increase administrative efficiency and bolster finances, the committee decided to employ permanent paid staff to manage the library and hireage of costumes. Other priorities included launching a major membership campaign and acquiring a licence for public entertainment in the Hall. Those challenges will be explored in this chapter.

Auckland expanded rapidly after the war, despite the continued rationing of some commodities until 1949. The harbour bridge that linked the North Shore to the central business district became operational in 1959. New motorways were built. The growth of the city owed much to its easily accessible Waitemata Harbour, and the international airport which was opened in 1966 at Mangere in south Auckland.370 Migrants from Great Britain and the Pacific Islands and refugees from Europe flocked to Auckland, as did rural Maori. All these changes contributed to the urban sprawl, which had a significant impact on the operations of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society.

In addition, rival musical societies both in the inner city and on the outskirts of Auckland provided serious competition after the end of World War II. As Aucklanders moved from the inner city in the 1950s to pursue their suburban dream on the new housing estates in outlying suburbs, many local operatic societies were established.371 This encouraged people to stay in their local communities, which resulted in a declining

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370 New Zealand Herald supplement, 26 August 2010, “Auckland Our Story: Our Sprawl 1950-1980s”, 10. In the 1940s international air services had commenced from Mechanics Bay, followed by limited services from Whenuapai.
371 Societies which were founded in the outer suburbs and have survived into 2009 include: Manukau Performing Arts, 1954; Papakura Theatre Company, 1954; Centrestage Theatre Company (Orewa), 1956; Harlequin Musical Theatre, 1959; North Shore Music Theatre, 1963; Pukekohe Light Opera Club, 1969; and Playhouse Theatre, 1972 (an amalgamation of Auckland Children’s Light Opera, St Thomas Light Opera Club and Henderson Festival Players/Western Players which were established in the early 1960s).
population in the central business district of Auckland. Consequently, the operatic society could no longer rely on the local community to support its productions.

Powerful competition came also from other quarters. Picture theatres were showing spectacular movies in black and white and colour, on increasingly wide screens. The popular music industry in New Zealand was slowly gaining momentum in line with the upsurge in the economy in the 1950s, and Auckland was the hub. Stebbing’s recording studio, as well as the nightclubs and dance halls were a considerable attraction for entertainers seeking fame.\(^{372}\) During the 1950s, songs from musicals continued to feature on radio programmes. However, in the 1960s contemporary songs by overseas pop singers such as Elvis Presley, Cliff Richard and The Beatles gained popularity. The use of the “belt” register, rather than an operatic style of singing, by pop singers influenced the tastes of the general public.\(^{373}\) In fact, modern Broadway musicals such as *South Pacific* featured songs that were sung in the belt register. “Honeybun” is an example.

A new phenomenon called television was introduced to New Zealanders in 1960. People were now able to view a range of entertainment from home, instead of venturing out to the theatre. Television song-and-dance shows featured modern music: singers used microphones, rather than relying on their own voice projection.\(^{374}\) It is apparent from the minutes of meetings that the society viewed these technological and social changes with concern. In its quest for survival, the society was forced to meet those challenges.

**New Horizons**

The Auckland Amateur Operatic Society was in a sound financial position in 1946, because *Katinka* had played to excellent houses and made a substantial profit.\(^{375}\) In celebration, the Hall interior was repainted cream. The pillars, an architectural feature, were highlighted in pastel blue. Other improvements included new steps for the stage, and modern card tables. As smoking was popular in this era, new ashtrays were purchased. Coloured matting for the cloakroom floors, mirrors on the walls and a new basin for the washroom were installed.

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\(^{373}\) A valid definition of the belt voice is difficult to find. However, this type of singing imitates the speech-like inflections of the voice and sometimes has a shouting quality. The opinions of teachers vary as to whether or not the belt voice is ruinous to the vocal chords. It is a contentious issue.  
\(^{374}\) In 1962, Auckland had only one television channel, AKTV2. Robert Young, a dancer, choreographer and committee member of the operatic society was choreographer for AKTV2.  
\(^{375}\) Annual report, 26 February 1946.
Based on a policy which had been instituted by NODA, the society decided to issue to loyal members a service medal, designed in the royal blue and old gold society colours. The first presentation would be to life members who had made a special contribution to the operations of the society. Mr Gordon Fagan, a longstanding member, qualified for two bars to his NODA long service medal.\(^{376}\)

The society, nevertheless, was aware that it behoved them to expand their operations. Accordingly, the committee planned to form a permanent ballet corps in the interests of both the dancers and the operatic society.\(^{377}\) However, a group of dance teachers wished to form a ballet company in their own right. In a bid to work together, the society suggested that ballet could be sponsored and controlled by the operatic society. This idea was received with limited enthusiasm by the dance teachers, many of whom had already set up extremely successful dancing schools, and whose pupils participated regularly in operatic society productions.

Another possible new venture was the sponsoring of the Auckland Symphony Orchestra by the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. This idea had its genesis in a newspaper article headed “Auckland Symphony Orchestra in the Doldrums” (\textit{Auckland Star}, 9 August 1946). Another project which appeared to have merit was the setting up of an official cultural centre and civic community theatre. On 8 November 1947, a combined meeting of performing arts societies was held to discuss the proposed projects, but nothing eventuated as agreement could not be reached. Instead, the society mounted small-scale productions such as plays, pantomimes and revues in its own Hall. Initially, attendance was restricted to members, because the Hall was not licensed for public entertainment. The society also reduced the price of the Hall rental to a rate below that charged in the pre-war years in an effort to increase hireage.

In 1946, the society explored the possibility of employing permanent staff to teach music, speech and drama.\(^{378}\) However, it was not until 1950 that drama classes were finally established. Weekly drama sessions spread over three months were conducted under the tutelage of John Thomson, an experienced teacher, actor and director.\(^{379}\) Thomson was paid a fee by the society, but members attended free of charge. Prior to the

\(^{376}\) Annual report, 31 January 1959. Each bar on the medal represented five years’ service to amateur theatre, over and above twenty-five years. The society normally awarded a twenty-five year medal (supplied by NODA) to a recipient. After thirty years’ service, the recipient received a silver bar to add to the medal. Every five years another bar was added, until the recipient achieved fifty years’ service. A new fifty-year medal was then awarded. Auckland Music Theatre is no longer a member of NODA.

\(^{377}\) Annual report, 26 February 1946.

\(^{378}\) Committee minutes, 31 October 1946.

\(^{379}\) Annual report, 31 January 1951. John Thomson was the brother of W. Laird Thomson.
war Thomson had been a schoolteacher, but in 1946 he received a New Zealand government bursary to train at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London for three years. Subsequently, he became a well known speech and drama teacher. In addition, he directed musicals for various societies throughout the Auckland region.

On his return from the war, W. Laird Thomson was reinstated to his former position as managing secretary at the rate of £150 per annum, payable monthly.\textsuperscript{380} The committee recognised that it could increase revenue by developing its hireage facility. Therefore, it resolved to hire a paid administrator to oversee the wardrobe, manage the library and deal with sundry matters. Miss Catherine Ince, a longstanding member, accepted the position at £5 per week.\textsuperscript{381} An honorary (unnamed) librarian was hired to assist Miss Ince to catalogue the scripts, scores and books. Thus, the costumes that had been stored in rental premises in Symonds Street were transferred to the Grafton Hall.

Consideration was given to compensating out-of-pocket expenses to members who took part in productions during 1946, as many were in straitened circumstances in the aftermath of the war. After much discussion, it was decided that the simplest strategy was for the society to provide stage makeup for performers in each dressing room. This plan was short-lived, as it proved too expensive.

According to Roland Everard, there was a spirit of camaraderie within the society from 1945 to 1949 because “the chairman, Arthur Brown, made members feel like part of an extended family”.\textsuperscript{382} Everard commented, however, that while the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society was the leading one in this era, musical societies in the outer suburbs gradually eroded its status. He explained that after his marriage he moved to the outer western suburbs and joined the Titirangi Light Opera Club, which was founded in 1957. Everard observed that the Titirangi club had made a significant contribution to the cultural life of Auckland: the productions staged were of a high standard, and the club was innovative in its choice of repertoire:

\textit{We did Tom Jones} (1962), for example, with a twenty-three piece orchestra and toured it. That was the first time \textit{Tom Jones} had ever been done in New Zealand. I played the part of Tom Jones and did the lighting and the advertising. . . . Later, I did shows for Theatre Arts in the early sixties and a lot of societies in other towns and graduated from amateur to semi-professional, then to professional.\textsuperscript{383} Everard credited his later success in Australian professional theatre to the experience he had gained in the amateur arena in New Zealand.

\textsuperscript{380} Committee minutes, 29 July 1946.
\textsuperscript{381} Committee minutes, 6 March 1946.
\textsuperscript{382} Telephone interview with Roland Everard, 26 June 2007.
\textsuperscript{383} Ibid.
An interesting point is that suburban societies had an advantage over the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society because of the growing number of amateur orchestras, often established by a music teacher at the local school. An example is the Henderson Chamber Orchestra, which played for many of the amateur operatic societies. Indeed, the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society used the Henderson Chamber Orchestra for some of its smaller productions, for example in the Town Hall Concert Chamber. However, in many instances, a piano and drums constituted the orchestra. As His Majesty’s Theatre was a professional venue, the operatic society was obliged to use paid musicians, who were members of the Musicians’ Union, for its major productions.

During 1957 and 1958, W. Laird Thomson, the managing secretary of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, visited major centres throughout the North Island, in an effort to promote the hireage of costumes and sets from the society. This public relations exercise resulted in a complete schedule of bookings for 1959 and two firm bookings for 1960. Costumes, sets and lighting equipment were hired to schools, student groups and professional touring companies. Negotiations were also conducted with South Island societies in a bid to increase their hireage, or purchase, of costumes and sets from the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society. A new sewing machine was purchased for Miss Ince to assist in maintaining the costumes of White Horse Inn, Kismet, Naughty Marietta, Dear Miss Phoebe and The New Moon.

Membership Drive

According to the minutes, between 1 August 1946 and 31 January 1947 the number of subscribers rose from 159 to 200. However, the society decided that membership numbers needed boosting. Accordingly, over a period of several months commencing in March 1947, the society launched a massive membership campaign. The benefits of membership included priority booking for two seats in the best part of the theatre. A detailed newsletter, outlining past achievements and future goals, was sent to existing subscribers. The society emphasised that not only had it always endeavoured to use the best performers, but also it relied on the goodwill of its loyal volunteers in all aspects of its operations. Despite its best endeavours, however, the cost of staging productions had risen from £1,800 when the company was founded, to £3,000 in 1947. The point was made also that because of the high cost, touring professional companies could not afford

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385 Committee minutes, 12 August 1946.
386 Finance committee minutes, 24 January 1947.
to produce some of the shows which had been staged by the operatic society. Therefore, it was due to the enterprising efforts of the society that members of the public had been able to view a variety of musicals.

Extensive press coverage was launched, with newspaper headlines (Auckland Star, 11 March 1947) declaring that the society aimed to recruit up to 10,000 members. In fact, the number of subscribers increased only to 1,740. Another membership campaign was instigated in 1950, and by 31 January 1951 the number of subscribers had risen to 1,904. The increase, however, was credited to the success of Chu Chin Chow (1950), because of the large number in the cast. Not only had cast members joined the society as required by the regulations, but also they had encouraged family and friends to attend the show. Granted, as the financial hardship of post-war days was easing by 1950, people had more expendable income.

Over the years obituaries became more numerous, owing to the aging membership. Moreover, the number of resignations escalated, with the price increase in subscriptions quoted as the reason. By 31 January 1958, membership was only 763, compared with 1,130 the previous year. However, a grant had been received from the Department of Internal Affairs which helped the society to achieve a £900 surplus for the year.

It was obvious that the executive was concerned by the constraints imposed on amateur rights by professional interests: the best-known musicals were not available to amateur societies. This problem would magnify in years to come. Specially-written plays for amateur productions in England and elsewhere were available, but the society did not feel it could justify the risk of presenting unknown works.

**The Wheel of Fortune**

With the aim of raising its profile, in 1958 the society decided to appoint a press relations officer who was paid a “modest” (unspecified) honorarium. Consequently, a great deal of pre-production publicity was secured for Kismet, including a two-page article in full colour in the New Zealand Woman’s Weekly. A professional copywriter assisted the press relations officer in compiling information for the fortieth-anniversary radio broadcasts. The information was broadcast on Sunday afternoons, for four weeks prior to the opening night of Kismet. Despite all the publicity, nonetheless, the musical incurred

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388 Annual report, 1 February 1951.
389 The price of seats in 1939 was 6/6d each for members, and from 7/6d to 9/- for non-members, as cited in the Rose Marie programme. By 1958, the price of seats for members was 10/-; prices for non-members are not quoted. As cited in the White Horse Inn programme.
heavy losses with only 10,123 people attending the show.\(^{391}\) Fortunately, a grant of £100 was received from the Auckland Savings Bank, plus donations of £100 each from Sir Ernest Davis and Mr H. J. Keliher. Temporary finance was secured with a bank overdraft, while the society applied for a grant from the Department of Internal Affairs.\(^{392}\)

This was a difficult period. Members queried the choice of shows because of the financial loss on *Kismet*, but the production research committee countered that it reviewed “hundreds of productions in various parts of the world” in the quest for new shows.\(^{393}\) They argued that familiar shows were more likely to be successful.

There were matters of greater moment, however. The Ministry of Works had given notice of the demolition of the Hall to make way for the new inner-city motorway. Furthermore, the building in Anzac Avenue where scenery and properties were stored had the “sword of Damocles” hanging over it, as a demolition order had been served on the owners.\(^{394}\) It was, therefore, essential for the operatic society stock to be moved. The Invercargill Amateur Operatic Society had offered to buy the *White Horse Inn* and *South Pacific* costumes, scenery and properties. Nevertheless, the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society needed new storage premises for the remainder of its stock. To add to the woes of the society, membership numbers continued to decline. The annual report for the year ended 31 January 1960 quoted membership numbers as 788, compared with 826 for the previous year. By the following year, membership stood at 755.

The society, like many others, was struggling not only to gain the rights for theatrical productions, but also to meet the increased costs of royalties and staging. While the society considered it expedient to remain a member of NODA, reinforcing the British connection, the time had come for New Zealand to establish its own local association. Consequently, in 1960, the New Zealand Federation of Operatic Societies was founded.\(^{395}\) This proved crucial to the survival of amateur theatre, as societies were able to provide a united front under an umbrella organisation. Mr W. Laird Thomson, managing secretary of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, was elected North Island vice-president as he


\(^{392}\) Ibid.

\(^{393}\) Annual report, 11 November 1959.

\(^{394}\) Annual report, 31 January 1960.

\(^{395}\) The federation head office was established in Palmerston North but eventually moved to Wellington because of the central location. By 1961, the federation had lobbied the Arts Advisory Council, forerunner of the QEII Arts Council, to establish a scheme of financial assistance to amateur theatre. In 1963 the federation set up a library of theatre scripts, scores and books, with a grant from the council.
had been instrumental in setting up the federation. Thirty-nine societies throughout the country had joined by December 1961.\textsuperscript{396}

The 1962 annual report recorded many important milestones. Members voted to change the name of the society to the “Auckland Operatic Society”, deleting the word “amateur”, because they considered their productions were of a professional standard.\textsuperscript{397} Two current members, Miss Patricia Price and Mr W. H. Johnson, had won the prestigious national New Zealand Mobil Song Quest. In addition, Miss Price, in conjunction with Miss Lynne Cantlon a former member of the society, had won the national Stenberg Aria Competition. Miss Heather Begg, another former member now living overseas, had secured the leading role of the Fairy Queen in Iolanthe at Sadlers Wells.\textsuperscript{398} The achievements of those singers on the national and international stage highlighted the high standard of performance which the society encouraged. In addition, a vice-president of the society, Mr J. A. Stenberg, had had the distinction of being appointed one of three directors of the newly-established New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation.

On a more sombre note, the death of Sir Ernest Davis, a long-standing vice-president of the society, was recorded. The resignations of both Mr W. Laird Thomson, the managing secretary, and Miss Beverley Simmons, the press relations officer, were accepted with regret. While reasons for the resignations were not given, it appears that the society may no longer have been able to afford their services: the income and expenditure account recorded a deficit of £1,600.\textsuperscript{399} The society had been forced to raise an overdraft to pay its creditors, and a raffle had been organised to supplement finances. Hireage to other societies had been very limited during 1962, but, fortuitously, the Invercargill Amateur Operatic Society had purchased the South Pacific set.

To reduce expenses, the committee decided that managerial and secretarial services should be covered at cost, with no payment for labour.\textsuperscript{400} Thus, committee members undertook more voluntary work for the society, and a concerted effort was made by word-of-mouth to increase audience numbers. As the Hall roof was leaking, the society applied for, and received, a grant from Kiwi funds.\textsuperscript{401} Consequently, not only was the workroom

\textsuperscript{396} Ghent and Nagy, eds., Gaffer Tape and Greasepaint, 6. Initially, the executive committee consisted of five representatives from various societies throughout New Zealand, plus a president, a North Island representative, a South Island representative and a secretary. As the membership base expanded, the country was divided into zones, with one representative for each zone elected by local societies. The representatives attend regular meetings in Wellington throughout the year.

\textsuperscript{397} Annual report, 28 November 1962.

\textsuperscript{398} Begg and Cantlon both became international opera stars.

\textsuperscript{399} Income and expenditure account, 31 October 1962.

\textsuperscript{400} Annual report, 28 November 1962.

\textsuperscript{401} Committee minutes, 11 September 1963.
section of the main hall re-roofed but also a skylight was added. Electrical heating was installed in the costume storage room, moreover, to prevent dampness. Pleasingly, Auckland City Council finally approved a licence for public entertainment in the Hall.

Many resignations were received during 1963, resulting in membership numbers dipping to 548, compared with 737 for the previous year. To add to the problems, Williamson’s had altered the dates for the major production in His Majesty’s Theatre, in favour of a professional overseas company. As the new dates proved unsatisfactory, the society opted instead for a musical revue devised by Rex Sayers, staged in the Hall. A surplus of £566 was recorded, but this was due mainly to a donation of £250 from the Auckland Savings Bank and a raffle which realised £492.

At the executive committee meeting on 21 January 1964, twenty-four resignations were received from members. The reasons were not apparent from the minutes, but there may have been some conflict between the younger and older members in regard to the choice of shows. The secretary resigned, as he felt the workload for the society was too heavy because of his other work commitments. As the society was in straitened financial circumstances, a motion was passed to make the position of secretary an honorary one.

A special meeting of members on 2 December 1964 voted to update the rules. It was resolved to change the membership structure to a two-tiered one: active and life, with a subscription of 10/- to £1. To prevent vote-stacking, one would now have to be a member for twelve months before being eligible to vote. Twelve members instead of sixteen would constitute the executive committee, and one-third of the committee instead of four members, would retire each year. A new rule required all members, including the committee, to audition if they wished to perform in a production. The rule changes were submitted to the registrar for approval.

Finances, nevertheless, continued to be problematic. In 1965, South Pacific recorded a small profit but Call Me Madam made a loss. On a positive note, more than one hundred people including a large group of new young members had auditioned for South Pacific. After praising the outstanding amateur talent in Auckland, the chairman explained that with good administration, planning and careful execution the society would

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402 Committee minutes, 19 March 1964.
403 Annual general meeting minutes, 12 December 1963.
404 Ibid.
405 Committee minutes, 19 March 1964.
406 Ibid.
407 To reduce costs for South Pacific, chorus members provided their own shorts, tops, shirts and footwear. New costumes were made for the principals and new sets were built.
408 Annual report, 13 January 1966.
continue to provide musical entertainment of the highest standard. He considered that the reputation of the society had been enhanced significantly by the activities of the past year. This was in contrast to “the damage done by others to amateur theatre in Auckland with hastily-prepared and shoddily-presented shows”.\footnote{Annual report, 13 January 1966.} The criticism was aimed at the Light Opera Club and Theatre Arts, the two rival inner city societies. It is significant, however, that in the previous year the operatic society had joined forces with the Light Opera Club to stage a highly-successful production of \textit{The Belle of New York}.

**Turning Point**

Far-reaching decisions were made in 1966. The society had taken heart from the influx of young members during 1965, and believed that it could enlarge the scope of its activities by embracing small dramas and musical plays. The idea was mooted that the society should venture into television production, but this did not eventuate. Two smaller productions, \textit{The Boyfriend} and \textit{Salad Days}, and the major production \textit{The King and I}, all made a profit.\footnote{Annual report, 11 December 1966.} Television channel AKTV2 had donated nine lighting dimmers to the society. The Federation of Operatic Societies, too, was thriving and offering good support.

Auckland City Council, however, confirmed that the society would have to vacate its premises during the next two years. Consequently, a business management committee was established to formulate a strategic plan. The momentous decision was made to set up the Auckland Musical Arts Trust, as has been discussed in chapter five.

There was also a cultural shift. It had been common practice throughout New Zealand for the national anthem \textit{God Save the Queen} to be played before each theatrical performance, while the audience stood to attention. However, a resolution was submitted by a committee member that the national anthem should be played only at the beginning and end of each season.\footnote{Committee minutes, 7 May 1967.} The motion was carried six votes to three. It is of interest that the three who voted against the motion were members of the same English-born family, who had migrated to Auckland during the past ten years. Obviously, they still felt a strong cultural tie with England.

It was decided to reduce the number of major shows staged each year, because only one had been financially successful since 1965, whereas the five smaller ones had recorded a profit.\footnote{Committee minutes, 23 April 1968.} In an effort to keep up to date, it was decided to once more re-write the rules. The chairman volunteered for this task, and presented a draft proposal to the
committee.\textsuperscript{412} The draft was duly amended, and tabled at a special meeting of members.\textsuperscript{413} Under the new rules the chairman, vice-chairman and secretary were to be elected at the annual general meeting by members, rather than by the executive committee. In view of the pending move from 33 Grafton Road, the possibility of amalgamating with another society such as Auckland Choral, the Light Opera Club or Grafton Theatre was mooted. While some of the committee favoured an amalgamation, particularly with Grafton Theatre, members at the annual general meeting in March 1970 voted against the motion.

The Repertoire 1946 to 1969

There was a growing awareness by the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society that the changing pattern of entertainment influenced by the growth of radio, movies and television, would affect the type of production that was likely to appeal to theatregoers. Accordingly, the society decided to diversify (table 4).

Table 4 Auckland (Amateur) Operatic Society repertoire from 1946 to 1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Composer and Lyricist or Playwright</th>
<th>National Origin</th>
<th>World Premiere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>The Vagabond King</td>
<td>Friml/Post/Hooker</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1925</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dick Whittington (pantomime)</td>
<td>Leo Pilcher\textsuperscript{414}</td>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Season of Ballet</td>
<td>Chopin/Richard Strauss/ Grieg/Ravel</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good Night, Vienna</td>
<td>Posford/Maschwitz</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>Bizet/Meilhac/Halevy</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Two Bouquets\textsuperscript{415}</td>
<td>Twenty unnamed composers and Eleanor and Herbert Farjeon</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>The Gondoliers</td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1899</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Chu Chin Chow</td>
<td>Norton/Asche</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1916</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Show Boat</td>
<td>Kern/Hammerstein II</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1927</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Playbill (featuring two plays):</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The Browning Version</td>
<td>Rattigan</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1948</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Harlequinade</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Chu Chin Chow</td>
<td>Norton/Asche</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1916</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ballet Season</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poison Pen (play)</td>
<td>Llewellyn</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1938</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Bartered Bride</td>
<td>Smetana/Sabina</td>
<td>Czechoslovakia</td>
<td>1866</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Sit down a Minute, Adrian (play)</td>
<td>Brandon-Thomas</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1948</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dear Miss Phoebe</td>
<td>Davies/Hassall</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>The Two Bouquets</td>
<td>Twenty unnamed composers and Eleanor and Herbert Farjeon</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The New Moon</td>
<td>Romberg/Hammerstein II/Mandel/Schwab</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1927</td>
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<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Hugh, the Drover</td>
<td>Vaughan Williams/Child</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1923</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alice in Wonderland</td>
<td>Addinsell/Ritchie/le Gallienne/Friebus</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1933</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>Naughty Marietta\textsuperscript{416}</td>
<td>Herbert/Young</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1910</td>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>Oklahoma!</td>
<td>Rodgers/Hammerstein II</td>
<td>USA</td>
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\textsuperscript{412} Committee minutes, 15 October 1968.
\textsuperscript{413} Minutes of special meeting, 31 March 1969.
\textsuperscript{414} Pilcher was a committee member.
\textsuperscript{415} Australasian premiere.
\textsuperscript{416} Australasian premiere.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Composer and Lyricist or Playwright</th>
<th>National Origin</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1961</td>
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<td>Something Funny Happened on the Way to the Theatre Tonight (revue)</td>
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<td>1965</td>
<td>Call Me Madam</td>
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<td>1966</td>
<td>The Boyfriend</td>
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<td>Palace of Varieties Music Hall</td>
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<td>1968</td>
<td>The Pajama Game</td>
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<td>1968</td>
<td>And So To Bed</td>
<td>Ellis</td>
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<td>1969</td>
<td>Can Can</td>
<td>Porter</td>
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<td>1969</td>
<td>The Fantasticks</td>
<td>Schmidt/Jones</td>
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<td>1969</td>
<td>Show Boat</td>
<td>Kern/Hammerstein II</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1927</td>
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<td>1969</td>
<td>Archy and Mehitabel</td>
<td>Kleinsinger/Darion</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1957</td>
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Source: Auckland Music Theatre records

For the first time in its history, the society produced a pantomime, two ballet seasons, four plays and a revue. The plays were British and the pantomime was based on an English fairytale, while the two revues included a mixture of folksongs (unspecified), and songs from British and American musicals and operetta. Musicals, however, formed the major part of the repertoire. Overall, of the 38 musicals staged, 19 (50%) were American whereas 14 (37%) were British (table 4). The popularity of the American musical was in line with trends emerging on Broadway and the West End.

According to Kenrick the mid-twentieth century marked the peak of achievement of the American musical, which had a significant impact on the popular music of the day. Certainly, in Auckland during the 1940s and 1950s, the most popular songs from stage musicals featured on the radio. Hollywood adapted Broadway successes into movies such as Call Me Madam (1953), starring Ethel Merman; The King and I (1956), starring Yul Brynner; and Can Can (1960), starring Shirley MacLaine. All those movies were screened in Auckland shortly after their release overseas: the musicals were staged by the society in

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417 Sayers was a committee member and performer.
418 Leathwick was a committee member and performer.
419 The programmes for both the 1961 and 1963 revues do not specify all the items. Some items are listed merely as “prologue” or “scena”, with the name of the performers.
420 Kenrick, Musical Theatre: A History, 266.
the 1960s. Although *The Sound of Music* (1965), starring Julie Andrews, proved the most successful Hollywood musical of the decade, the stage show has never been produced by the operatic society. However, it has been a popular choice for other societies in the Auckland region.

While many American musicals were imported into the West End during this era, an English musical called *Salad Days* (1954) became the longest-running one of the 1950s.421 Another English musical, *The Boyfriend* (1954), starring Julie Andrews, proved a success both in the West End and on Broadway. The Auckland Operatic Society staged *Salad Days* and *The Boyfriend* in 1966, as small-scale productions in its 120-seat Hall. Kenrick points out that by the mid-1960s Broadway had been “demoted to being a cultural side street”, despite the success of musicals such as *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964) and *Mame* (1966).422 That was not the case, however, in the repertoire of the Auckland Operatic Society where the number of American musicals progressively increased.

The 1940s

The repertoire of the society shows that there was a resurgence of British musicals in the immediate aftermath of World War II, as soldiers returned and life began to assume some normality. On 19 February 1946, a special meeting of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society committee was convened to select the next production. Potential musicals included *The Vagabond King*, *Florodora*, *Miss Hook of Holland* and *The Red Mill*. A musical set in the Middle Ages, *The Vagabond King*, was chosen. The committee considered it would be the cheapest option, because costumes and scenery could be hired at special rates through Williamson’s. It transpired, however, that Samuel French Ltd in London controlled the copyright. Therefore, *The Vagabond King* was mounted with reconstructed scenery and refurbished costumes from previous musicals.

On 11 April 1946, the Hall committee advised that Mr Baxendale of Radio 1YA had been asked to check the Hall acoustics. As a marketing exercise, the committee had decided to record a chorus number from *The Vagabond King*, for an advance broadcast. The National Broadcasting Service representative, Mr Eric Waters, was interviewed by the committee of the society. A broadcast of twenty minutes for a fee of £10/10/- from the radio 1YA hall, rather than the Hall of the society, was arranged.423 However, because of unforeseen copyright difficulties with Samuel French Ltd, the broadcast did not eventuate.

422 Ibid., 313.
423 Committee minutes, 12 August 1946.
Mr Rex Sayers indicated, however, that he had contacted Mr Wrathall of radio 1ZB, to organise a spoken broadcast under the title “We found a Story”.

To reduce expenses, the committee decided to organise an amateur orchestra for the musical. However, the Musicians’ Union was adamant that only professional musicians who were members of their union could be employed in His Majesty’s Theatre. The operatic society committee, however, believed that according to their own rules and those of the Musicians’ Award, they were permitted to use an amateur orchestra at any time. After some turbulent negotiation, The Vagabond King did proceed with an orchestra of professional paid musicians. Unfortunately, the season resulted in a deficit of £277. However, as the Wanganui Amateur Music and Dramatic Society subsequently hired the set and costumes for £150, the deficit was offset to an extent.

Dick Whittington (1946), a Christmas pantomime in two acts based on an English fairytale, and written and produced by committee member Leo Pilcher, was a new type of venture. It was the first full-length musical to be mounted in the Grafton Hall and was performed only for members and their families, as the Hall was not licensed for public entertainment. Four of the principals had played leading roles in The Vagabond King: Roland Everard, Odette Marsack, Fred Fullbrook and Kevin Colebrook. Backcloths were designed and painted by Leo Pilcher and his assistants. A photograph of Dick Whittington, flanked by other characters, shows the Highgate Hill backdrop in act 1 (plate 12).

Plate 12 Dick Whittington (1946), act 1, Highgate Hill courtesy Roland and Yvonne Everard

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424 Committee minutes, 24 October 1946.
425 Ibid.
426 Dick Whittington (1946) programme, 4. The society had staged cabarets and concerts in the Hall, but never a musical or play.
427 The Vagabond King (1946) programme, 7.
In honour of the occasion, the opening night was a formal one. The chairman, secretary and Leo Pilcher wore dinner suits, while other committee members wore dark-blue suits. All committee members wore society badges, adorned with coloured ribbons. The pantomime, which was staged for six nights from 11 December, recorded a profit of £65, a substantial sum for a small production. While the ticket price was not recorded, it would certainly have been less than that charged for major productions. However, expenses were lower for a variety of reasons. First, as the society mounted the pantomime in its own Hall, it did not have to pay a hireage fee. Second, Leo Pilcher had not only graciously waived royalties, but also designed and painted the scenery with a team of assistants. Thus, the society paid only for the cost of materials. Third, all the costumes and properties had been created from existing stocks. The programme highlighted the efforts of all concerned:

The pantomime DICK WHITTINGTON represents the Society’s first attempt at developing a series of miniature productions in the Grafton Road Hall. . . . We have a production written, arranged, produced and staged entirely by members of the Society, which gives scope to members in every aspect of Stage Work with all its intricacies of writing, producing, stage managing, orchestration, prompt, calls, make up, scene building, painting, props, lighting and all the varied jobs that go to make a successful show. The Committee feels that in attempting work of this kind they are giving active members an outlet for latent talent that has previously been denied them and feel sure that the experience gained in our miniature theatre cannot but reflect itself in the future calibre of our major productions.429

Despite the success of Dick Whittington, however, it would be some years before another miniature production was staged.

The society mounted its first season of ballet at His Majesty’s Theatre in 1947. It starred Rachel Cameron, a well known Australian ballerina, who had trained and danced with both the Borovansky and Kirsova companies. The programme included Les Sylphides with music by Chopin, Rosenkavalier Waltzes with music by Richard Strauss and Fete with music by Debussy and Ibert. The contribution by “all the Dancing Studios of Auckland” was noted in the programme.430 The outlay of £2,000 by the society was recouped, with a profit.

Good Night, Vienna (1947), produced by A. J. C. Fisher, was presented with much fanfare. A note in the programme pointed out that the musical had been presented initially as a radio operetta “devised by Holt Marvel, a pseudonym for Eric Maschwitz”.431 It had made a transition to the screen, starring Jack Buchanan and Anna Neagle. Consequently, the work was familiar to the Auckland public. Of major interest, however, was the fact

428 Committee minutes, 26 November 1946.
429 Dick Whittington programme, 4.
430 A Season of Ballet programme, 3.
431 Good Night, Vienna programme, 7.
that amateur societies including the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, had mounted the stage version prior to the professional West End production:

At present, in 1947, it is difficult to find an amateur society in the British Isles which has not presented this now famous play. Just before the war professional managements realised its commercial potentialities and arrangements were made for a professional tour, and West End of London production, but the outbreak of hostilities caused this project to be cancelled. However, the beginning of 1947 saw the first professional production of this play. It will shortly have a West End of London Season.\footnote{432}

A short article that explained the difference between light opera and grand opera was also included in the programme. The committee considered that it was important for members to be informed, as the next major production was the opera, \textit{Carmen} (figure 20).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{about-light-opera}
\caption{About Light Opera, \textit{Good Night Vienna (1947) programme}}
\end{figure}

\textit{Carmen} (1948) was staged in collaboration with the New Zealand Broadcasting Service and the National Orchestra at His Majesty’s Theatre.\footnote{433} Bernard Beeby, a New Zealander with a long list of performing credits to his name, and now Supervisor of Production for the N.Z. Broadcasting Service, produced the opera. English-born Andersen Tyrer, a well known pianist and composer who was the resident conductor for the National Orchestra from 1946 to 1949, was the musical director.\footnote{434} Gordon Cole, a well known music teacher in Auckland, was the chorus master. He had undertaken the role of musical director for the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society after the illness, and subsequent death, of Colin Muston.

\footnote{432 \textit{Good Night, Vienna} programme, 7.}
\footnote{433 There are no minutes, annual reports or financial records available from February 1947 to December 1949. All the information has been gleaned from the programme and newspaper cuttings. It can only be assumed that the costs of the production were shared between the society, the New Zealand Broadcasting Service and the National Orchestra.}
\footnote{434 \textit{Carmen} (1948) programme. Throughout the programme, in newspaper critiques and in Joy Tonks’ \textit{Bravo! The NZSO at 50}, Tyrer’s Christian name is spelt “Andersen”.}
The leading lady, Miss Janet Howe (Carmen), and the leading man, Mr Arthur Servent (Don Jose), were imported from England. Two Dunedin singers, Bryan and Dora Drake, undertook the roles of Escamillo and Micaela. All other roles and the chorus were played by members of the operatic society. *Carmen* was staged also in Dunedin, Christchurch and Wellington. Based on the limited information available, the two leading singers, as well as Bryan and Dora Drake, the musical director, the producer and the orchestra toured with the production. Sets and costumes also toured. However, the minor principals and chorus were provided by local operatic societies in each centre: Dunedin Operatic Society, Christchurch Operatic Society and Wellington Operatic and Theatrical Society. The season extended four months overall with thirty-three performances.

The arrival in Auckland of Janet Howe and Arthur Servent created a sense of excitement. The *New Zealand Listener* (28 May 1948), the “voice” of the broadcasting service, reported:

Both singers give the lie to the standard conception of an operatic star. Instead of being fat, fair, forty and solid, Miss Howe is dark, slim, young, vivacious, full of fun, and with the added attraction of a chic “new look” outfit would turn the most jaundiced male eye in her direction. Arthur Servent has an accent as is expected of an operatic tenor, but it is the homely accent of Yorkshire instead of that of a foreign country, and in place of excitability there is quiet friendliness and good humour.

The comment that Arthur Servent’s Yorkshire accent was “homely” rather than “foreign” was intriguing, given that New Zealand was starting to develop its own unique accent, and highlighted the close ties with Great Britain. The reporter, who interviewed the two stars on Radio 1YA, was delighted that they recited their respective histories in “Cockney, Yorkshire and Standard English” (*New Zealand Listener*, 28 May 1948). Arthur Servent who had sung with Sadler’s Wells, proudly stated that he had commenced his singing career as a chorister in the Bradford Cathedral Choir, followed by leading roles in the Bradford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society. He confessed to having great respect for amateur performers. Janet Howe, on the other hand, had sung the role of Carmen sixty-eight times. She had received a scholarship to study in Italy, from a fund set up by the famous British contralto Dame Clara Butt.

On the opening night of a nine-performance season in Auckland, L. C. M. Saunders, the theatre and music critic, declared that for the first time in eight years Aucklanders had been fortunate enough to attend an opera (*New Zealand Herald*, 20 August 1948). Generally, the critics were enthusiastic. They agreed that Janet Howe, an outstanding singer and actress, was the star. The amateur principals and chorus, alike, were complimented on their exemplary performance under the guidance of Gordon Cole.

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435 Tonks, *Bravo! The NZSO at 50*, 165. The considerable input by amateur operatic societies is not mentioned in Tonks’ account.
Carmen was fully booked for the season, much to the delight of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society.

The closing night party was a formal function. It was held in the Hall, which had been tastefully decorated with special lighting effects and “fine period furniture on the stage to transform it into a late 19th Century drawing room”, rather reminiscent of Great Britain (New Zealand Herald, 8 September 1948). As if to reinforce the connection with “home”, an article appeared in a local newspaper (Auckland Star, 18 September 1948), observing that the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society had been sending food parcels regularly to the Sadler’s Wells Ballet Company.

The 1950s

The 1951 annual report stated that Show Boat, produced by John Thomson, would be a New Zealand premiere, and provide “exceptional scope for individual performers”.436 The musical had proved popular overseas, and many of its melodies were familiar to Auckland audiences through the medium of radio. Show Boat (1951) was staged for thirteen performances in the prestigious central city St James Theatre. Much of the advance publicity promoted the lavish costumes, which had been designed by Molly Cook, a Wellingtonian (Auckland Star, 10 March 1951). Other promotional material explained that several members of the chorus and some principals were required to perform in “blackface”. A group photograph shows three performers in blackface (plate 13).

Plate 13 Show Boat (1951), group photograph featuring blackface makeup
by kind permission Auckland Musical Arts Trust

436 Annual report, 31 January 1951.
Exposed parts of the performers’ bodies were also covered with black greasepaint. Those who were allergic to the black greasepaint wore black masks, while their bodies were covered with long-sleeved jerkins, black gloves and black tights.

A newspaper review (*Auckland Star*, 21 May 1951), commented in glowing terms on the American element, but with a bow to Gilbert and Sullivan:

One of the United States’ most sought-after exports today are her musicals – infectious bits of Americana that sparkle with the songs, warmth and gaiety of a vigorous young nation in springtime mood. And few have won a place in human hearts everywhere like ‘Show Boat’, sailed across the stage of St James’ Theatre on Saturday night by a spirited Auckland Amateur Operatic Society crew. The simple melodies of ‘Show Boat’ are very familiar. They are hummed and sung in English-speaking households more widely, perhaps, than any from other American operettas – possibly are excelled only by those from the Gilbert and Sullivan repertoire.

One reporter interviewed a group of performers backstage, and was fascinated by the fair-skinned performers who became the “ten piccaninnies” with the use of artful makeup (*Weekly News*, 6 June 1951). Three of the ten were schoolgirls. Both the dancing and the costumes of the “coloured” ballet were highlights of the show. The “white-spotted red pantaloons, snow-white pinafores and ragged black hair” in their opening number brought a round of applause each night (*Weekly News*, 6 June 1951). On the closing night, crowds of people were waiting at the stage door after the show to transport the performers to various parties in their honour, which suggests that there was status attached to performing in the musical.

Following the acting classes that had been conducted in 1950 by John Thomson, several younger members of the society had expressed a desire to gain experience in acting. Therefore, the society presented a series of plays for the first time in its history. Apart from assisting members to hone their acting skills, plays were cheaper to stage than musicals, because an orchestra was not required and the casts were smaller. Terence Rattigan’s *Playbill*, which consisted of two plays *The Browning Version* and *Harlequinade*, was chosen in 1951. This was a contemporary offering. *Playbill* had premiered at the Phoenix Theatre, London in 1948/49 and *The Browning Version* was rated as the best play of the year by five leading critics in London.437

*The Browning Version* is set in a South of England Public School. It focuses on a classics master who has a brilliant academic career, but a strained relationship with his wife, students and colleagues. In contrast, *Harlequinade* was billed as “an uproarious farce”438. The setting is a theatre stage and the action takes place during the rehearsals for *Romeo and Juliet*, but Shakespeare is secondary to the more amusing antics of the actors.

437 *Playbill* (1951) programme, 10.
438 Ibid., 5. Harlequin is a mute character in traditional pantomime, usually masked and dressed in a diamond-patterned costume. He was originally a stock comic character in the Italian *commedia dell’arte*.
**Playbill** was mounted in the Hall at minimum cost, because all scenery, props and costumes were prepared by members of the cast and backstage crew. The plays made a profit, as did *Poison Pen* (1952). However, *Sit Down a Minute, Adrian* (1953), staged in the Town Hall Concert Chamber, recorded a loss because the play was poorly patronised.

Contrary to the expectations of the society, the English musical *Dear Miss Phoebe* (1953) based on the novel *Quality Street* by Sir James Barrie, did not have public appeal. The society had made every effort to provide effective marketing, and costumes had been specially designed by Molly Cook who had been inspired by the London production. As noted in the programme, the “military uniforms worn during the production are authentic reproductions of the British Army ones in 1815”.

A design book features all the costumes painted in water colours. A selection of costumes for Valentine Brown, the leading man, shows the attention to detail (figure 21).

![A selection of costumes for Valentine Brown, the leading man, shows the attention to detail (figure 21).](image)

In retrospect, the society deduced that *Dear Miss Phoebe* was atypical in that it was a straight play set to music, calling for a limited chorus. Thus, neither the members nor the general public had supported the production, as they preferred shows that featured large choruses. Although the society believed that the small chorus in the musical was the major reason for its failure to make a profit, there were, perhaps, other reasons. On the one hand, World War II was a disturbing recent memory. On the other hand, the era in which *Quality Street* takes place during the Napoleonic Wars from 1806 to 1815, may have been too recent to be escapist yet too far in the past to have contemporary appeal.

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439 *Dear Miss Phoebe* programme, 10.
440 Annual report, 4 May 1954.
Fortunes for the society continued to be mixed. After the failure of *Dear Miss Phoebe*, the society decided to stage musicals with large choruses for major productions, in the hope of making a profit. This strategy, however, did not prove an unmitigated success. *The New Moon* (1954), which had been successful in 1936, resulted in a deficit. *Hugh the Drover* (1955), an English opera staged in conjunction with the Auckland Festival Society, was given a “mixed reception” by the public, although professional singers from England and Australia were imported for the leading roles, as was the producer, Mr H. Powell Lloyd from Covent Garden. Messrs Oswald Cheeseman and W. Lindsay Hall were conductor and chorus master, respectively. The 1956 annual report stated that it was due only to the “substantial income from hiring” that the society had achieved a small surplus of $154.

A musical of German origin proved the greatest success of the decade. *White Horse Inn* (1958), produced by John Thomson and choreographed by Doreen O’Leary, was promoted as “a musical comedy in three acts”, and became one of the most popular musicals in the history of the society. *White Horse Inn* is set in the Salzkammergut area of northern Austria, a well known tourist location. The programme points out that “our scene-designer, Will J. Conroy, captures very faithfully the atmosphere of St. Wolfgang and the architecture of the Inn”. A painted backdrop, featuring the mountains of the Salzkammergut region, proved an effective setting for the inn in the foreground (plate 14).

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Plate 14 *White Horse Inn* (1958), act 1 finale
courtesy Susan Story

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441 Annual report, 31 January 1956. There are no minutes available for this period. The annual report devotes only three lines to *Hugh the Drover*, stating that it had given the society an opportunity to collaborate with overseas principals. No reasons are given for choosing the opera. However, the Festival Society, which wielded great influence in this era, may have made the choice.  
442 Ibid.  
443 Annual report, 31 January 1959. It was emphasised that this was the first presentation of the musical in the Dominion since the professional tours of a previous generation.  
444 *White Horse Inn* (1958) programme, 9.
A total of 23,771 theatregoers attended, which was 77.8% of the total seating capacity, a high figure. The season was extended to twenty-three performances, instead of the usual fourteen, resulting in a profit of £3,200. To this point, the only musicals which had exceeded it in attendance were *Tutankhamen* (1923) and *Chu Chin Chow* (1950). A paragraph in the programme explains that many Aucklanders had expressed interest in the production, because they had visited the Salzkammergut and stayed at the White Horse Inn. Moreover, keen interest had been shown by numerous migrants formerly resident in Austria and Switzerland, who knew the area in which the play was centred. In fact, the original owner of the inn now lived in Wellington. There had been a considerable influx of European refugees to New Zealand after World War II, many of whom had spent time in the displaced persons’ camps in Austria and Germany. Thus, the location of the musical may have resonated with them. Moreover, many of the migrants may have been familiar with the musical, given that it originated in Europe.

In the meantime while the operatic society struggled with its choice of repertoire, newly-established societies in the outer suburbs were enjoying success. A case in point was the Papatoetoe Light Opera Club in south Auckland. In common with many suburban societies, the club was able to stage its productions in a local school hall, which was much cheaper to hire than His Majesty’s Theatre. Young married couples who performed in the shows often worked locally and had children attending school. Consequently, there was a strong sense of community, unlike the central business district of Auckland with its declining population. Papatoetoe Light Opera Club was fortunate enough also to have access to a proficient amateur orchestra. Brian O’Connor, a longstanding member of Auckland Music Theatre, worked with many other societies including the Papatoetoe Light Opera Club. Initially in his career, O’Connor specialised in the patter songs of Gilbert and Sullivan. He recalled:

> The Papatoetoe Light Opera Club were doing *Yeoman of the Guard* and didn’t have a Jack Point so I auditioned and got the role. They had always done Gilbert and Sullivan until then, but wanted to break away from it . . . We scouted around and chose a Victor Herbert musical, *Sweethearts*. So, until the mid-sixties, I directed ten musicals for them. We also had the use of a very good orchestra. Consequently, they stuck to the operetta-type styling and we did shows like *Naughty Marietta*, *Orpheus in the Underworld* and *La Vie Parisienne*. About the same time, I auditioned for the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society when they did *Iolanthe* (1960), and was accepted into the chorus.

O’Connor commented that it was the policy of the Papatoetoe Light Opera Club to choose musicals which required large choruses, as they wished to give as many people as possible

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446 Ibid.
447 The society is now called the Manukau Performing Arts.
the opportunity to perform. This boosted audience numbers, because relatives and friends flocked to see the productions.

The 1960s

Once again the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society was in difficult financial straits, and was forced to choose a musical that could be staged on a very low budget. They chose *Iolanthe*. The programme noted that as the last major staging of this “classic” in Auckland had been in January 1951, it was time for a new younger generation of theatregoers to be introduced to *Iolanthe*.449 A paragraph headed “Topical Allusions in the Libretto” alerted patrons to such interesting facts as “the first act is set in an Arcadian Landscape named after that beautiful area in ancient Greece where everyone dwelt peacefully and happily among rustic surroundings”.450

Unfortunately, a backstage drama overtook the halcyon onstage setting. Vivian Jacobs, who had spent several years overseas serving in World War II and then living in England, returned to New Zealand in 1958.451 He immediately re-joined the society, and was appointed assistant producer for *Kismet* and producer for *Iolanthe*. Jacobs had had several years of experience producing musicals in England, culminating in his accreditation as a NODA producer. However, during rehearsals for *Iolanthe* an Englishman called David Rossiter, who also was an accredited NODA producer, arrived in Auckland. The society immediately hired him to co-produce with Jacobs, who was somewhat piqued. New Zealand-born Jacobs maintained that the society was impressed because Rossiter was an English-born NODA producer which, apparently, gave him superior status.452

There were other problems. Jacobs had envisaged the fairy costumes in strong pastel shades, with Phyllis and the more senior fairies in lighter shades graduated in ever-deepening colours to a shade of gold for the Fairy Queen. Jacobs felt that Iolanthe should be wearing white. However, the wife of the vice-chairman of the operatic society, who was playing the part of Iolanthe, argued that her costume should not be white. Jacobs replied, “I’m directing this production”, and the vice-chairman replied, “No, you’re not; the committee is directing this”.453 Jacobs was taken aback. In the interview he commented that “it was the nastiness of the attitude of the vice-chairman I objected to.

450 Ibid.
452 Ibid.
453 Ibid.
That’s when I departed. Nevertheless, amongst my souvenirs I have a nice letter from W. Laird Thomson, the secretary of the society, thanking me for my services as producer of *Iolanthe*. This episode highlighted the power of the committee and, perhaps, nepotism.

Jacobs departed at the end of the season to set up an opposition society called Theatre Arts. However, the *Iolanthe* programme was enlightening, because rather than listing the producer, co-producer and musical director at the front of the programme as was normal procedure, the page was headed “Men at the Top . . .” with brief biographies of Vivian Jacobs, David Rossiter and W. Lindsay Hall (Musical Director), in the order listed here. Therefore, the society did not nominate anyone as producer, choosing instead to evade the problem. *Iolanthe* did make a small profit, because of low production costs.

*King’s Rhapsody* (1961), the first Ivor Novello show to be staged in Auckland by an amateur society, was chosen because there was ample work for both chorus and ballet, but was not a financial success. *South Pacific* (1961), on the other hand, proved popular. The Hollywood movie, starring Mitzi Gaynor, had fired the imagination of the Auckland public. Of interest is that the *South Pacific* movie was being screened in a theatre across the road from His Majesty’s during the same period as the stage production. The operatic society cast Lynne Cantlon, an eighteen-year old coloratura soprano, in the role of Nellie. Cantlon was complimented on her acting and attractive appearance. Nevertheless, a newspaper critic pointed out that “a touch of brass is needed to send along a number like *I’m in love with a wonderful guy*” (*Auckland Star*, 12 September 1960). Cantlon’s voice was likened to “woodwinds”.

Rex Sayers, the chairman, drew attention to the trend towards professionalism in theatre circles in Auckland. He pointed out that it was incumbent upon the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society to continue providing amateur theatre of a high standard, despite the prevailing conditions. Although it is not stated, there is no doubt that Sayers was referring to Theatre Arts, which had been founded recently by an ex-member of the operatic society, Vivian Jacobs. Theatre Arts had staged an extremely successful first production, *The Student Prince*, in His Majesty’s Theatre for three weeks during 1962. Jacobs explained:

I brought out a tenor, James Hawthorne; a director, Bert Yarborough; a comedian, Fred Harper, all from New York. I had a good contact in New York, an old squadron friend, who knew someone who knew an agent. . . . Kathy was Mary O’Brien, who was New Zealand’s top opera singer. She was

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454 Personal interview with Vivian Jacobs, 23 June 2007.
455 Annual report, 31 October 1961. In the *King’s Rhapsody* programme, John Thomson is cited as “director and producer”. At the time, the title for the person directing a show was “producer”.
delightful. . . . I chose to bring in artistes from America rather than England, because I had contacts in New York which I didn’t have in London.\footnote{457}  

The Auckland Amateur Operatic Society acknowledged that the Theatre Arts’ production had impacted detrimentally on attendances at both \textit{The Mikado} and \textit{Where’s Charley?} in 1962. Shortly after this, the society removed the word “amateur” from its title. In 1963, to save money the society staged a revue in its own Hall, rather than hiring His Majesty’s for a major production.

In the meantime, the society was approached by Frank Poore of the Auckland Light Opera Club, who suggested a joint production of \textit{The Belle of New York}.\footnote{458} Mr Gillespie, the committee member allocated to deal with the matter, reported on his meeting with Poore. A detailed agreement, outlining the terms and conditions of the joint production, was tabled and accepted. Subsequently, £500 was placed in the joint bank account with the Auckland Light Opera Club for \textit{The Belle of New York}.

Unfortunately, difficulty had been experienced in rallying sufficient numbers for the large chorus: only six operatic society members had attended the initial meeting. Therefore, singing teachers in Auckland were approached to supply singers. Two well known overseas singers, Suzanne Steele and Jon Weaving, were imported from Sadler’s Wells in London to play the leading roles.\footnote{459} The press coverage was immense, helped greatly by the fact that Steele and Weaving were attractive and talented.

As the production proved an outstanding success, consideration was given to staging another joint venture, \textit{The Pirates of Penzance}, with the Auckland Light Opera Club.\footnote{460} After intense discussion, a motion that the project should proceed was put before the committee of the Auckland Operatic Society, and lost. As a result, Messrs Tester and Gillespie resigned from the committee, but did offer to assist until two successors were appointed. Tester and Gillespie were asked to withdraw their resignations: other committee members stressed that their objection was only to the choice of musical, not to another joint venture. Nevertheless, as an impasse had been reached, it was decided instead to produce \textit{The Beggar’s Opera} in the Hall, in conjunction with the Auckland Festival Society.

Owing to the financial success of \textit{The Belle of New York}, the society was able to stage \textit{South Pacific} (1965) at His Majesty’s Theatre. David Rossiter was the producer, with W. Lindsay Hall as musical director. The role of Emile was sung by Lucas Bunt, a

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{457} Personal interview with Vivian Jacobs, 23 June 2007.
\item \footnote{458} Committee minutes, 19 March 1964.
\item \footnote{459} Committee minutes, 13 October 1964.
\item \footnote{460} Ibid.
\end{itemize}}
Dutch professional opera singer, who was domiciled in Auckland. The leading role of
Nellie was played by Daphne Payne, a twenty-three year old petite blonde from Blenheim,
now living in Auckland. Payne’s physical beauty and trim figure were an attraction, as
was the female chorus, who were clad in shorts and tops in several scenes (plate 15).

Much of the success of the musical was due to Payne’s ability to sing with equal
ease as an operatic soprano and a “belt” singer. For instance, Payne sang “Some
Enchanted Evening” operatically, but belted “I’m in Love with a Wonderful Guy” and
“Honeybun”. In 2009, singing in the belt register is commonplace, but it was unusual in
1965 when much of the singing was operatic.

It is of interest to briefly compare the repertoire of the operatic society with its two
inner-city competitors, the Auckland Light Opera Club and Theatre Arts, from 1962 to
1965 (table 5).

Table 5 Comparison of repertoire of Auckland Operatic Society, Auckland Light Opera Club
and Theatre Arts from 1962 to 1965

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Auckland Operatic Society</th>
<th>Auckland Light Opera Club</th>
<th>Theatre Arts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>The Mikado</td>
<td>The Music Man</td>
<td>The Student Prince*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where’s Charley?</td>
<td>Carousel</td>
<td>Amahl and the Night Visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother Goose (pantomime)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Something Funny Happened on the Way to the Theatre Tonight (revue)</td>
<td>Oklahoma!</td>
<td>Little Mary Sunshine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cinderella (pantomime)</td>
<td>The Boyfriend (with Grafton Theatre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Desert Song*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>The Belle of New York</td>
<td>The Belle of New York</td>
<td>Hi-Lo Revue (Fiji)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Beggar’s Opera</td>
<td>Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves</td>
<td>Song of Norway*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Carousel</td>
<td>Kiss Me Kate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>South Pacific</td>
<td>The Pirates of Penzance</td>
<td>East Lynne (melodrama)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Call Me Madam</td>
<td>The Maid of the Mountains</td>
<td>Babes in Toyland*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aladdin (pantomime)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

sources: programmes of the three societies
Although Theatre Arts was established in 1960 and officially disbanded in 1966, productions were staged between 1962 and 1965, hence the dates chosen for the comparison. For the four Theatre Arts productions marked with an asterisk, overseas professionals were imported. *The Student Prince*, *The Desert Song* and *Song of Norway* were staged in His Majesty’s Theatre. *Babes in Toyland* was staged in the 800-seat Prince Edward Theatre, which would become the professional Mercury Theatre in 1968. The smaller productions including *Little Mary Sunshine*, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, *The Boyfriend* and *East Lynne* were staged in the 150-seat Lewis Eady Theatre, which was located above the music shop.\(^{461}\) The Hi-Lo Revue which toured to Fiji was staged at the Lautoka Northern Club, the Suva town hall and the Korolevu Mocambo Hotel. Performers paid their own fares, but accommodation and food was paid by Theatre Arts. Yvonne Phillips-Everard, an Australian domiciled in Auckland, was the leading lady for several of the Theatre Arts productions and eventually became a professional performer in both Australia and New Zealand. She remembered the high standard of the productions:

In 1963, for *The Desert Song*, Viv Jacobs brought in the stars Jack Goode and William Lewis from America. They came back for *Song of Norway* with Patricia Morison. We had a very, very strong chorus and when Patricia heard them she was absolutely astounded. She said, “I did not realise this was going to be of such a high calibre” . . . We were going to do *Kiss Me Kate* later in the year and she sketched all the original costumes she’d worn in *Kiss Me Kate* on Broadway. She was the original Kate.\(^{462}\)

Theatre Arts toured *Song of Norway* to Wellington. Some of the local performers who worked in fulltime occupations other than theatre resigned from their day jobs, because they were pleased to have an opportunity to tour with professionals.

The Auckland Light Opera Club had a wide-ranging repertoire. Staging a Christmas pantomime had become a tradition over the years. Moreover, Frank Poore, the musical director and driving force of the opera club, sometimes imported overseas professionals, as in *The Belle of New York* (1964) the joint production with the operatic society, and *The Maid of the Mountains* (1965).\(^{463}\) All the productions listed in table 5 were mounted at His Majesty’s Theatre. While neither the Auckland Light Opera Club nor Theatre Arts survived, in their time they provided strong competition for the Auckland Operatic Society. It appears from table 5 that both societies had a more successful 1963 season than did the operatic society.

In 1966, the Auckland Operatic Society staged two small shows, *The Boyfriend* and *Salad Days*, in the Hall. Many new members participated. The shows also toured as far

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\(^{461}\) Personal interview with Vivian Jacobs, 23 June 2007.


\(^{463}\) *The Belle of New York* (1964) programme.
north as Helensville and as far south as Te Awamutu. Both shows recorded a profit. The most financially successful musical in this decade, however, was *The King and I* (1966), produced by John Atha and choreographed by Robert Young, with the two-week season being extended by seven days. Children from the Indian community in Auckland were invited to play the roles of the princes and princesses, with two alternating casts. The leading lady, Margaret Blay, was an experienced performer. Bette Spiro, a well known Auckland singer whose family had been associated with the operatic society since its inception, played the role of Lady Thiang. Spiro, who was known for dedication to her art, managed through her contacts in America to view snippets from the *King and I* movie. Consequently, she arranged to have her costumes designed in line with those worn by Lady Thiang in the movie. The sets and costumes for the production were lavish (plate 16).

Bernie Baia, the leading man, was an American-born professional singer who had been raised in Brazil, and travelled throughout the world with various performing troupes. He had lived in Australia, and was now domiciled in Auckland. According to the committee, it had been made clear to Baia at the outset that he would not be paid for his performance as the king, because the society was an amateur one. At the end of the three-week season, however, a letter was received from Baia, requesting a bonus of £100 for his performance in the musical. Baia claimed that the chairman had agreed to pay him a bonus if the musical was a financial success. After lengthy discussion, the committee

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464 Annual general meeting minutes, 11 December 1966.
465 Committee minutes, 11 December 1966.
instructed the secretary to write to Baia stating that neither the present, nor the past, committee had any knowledge of a bonus. No more was heard from Baia.

The Hollywood musical The Pajama Game (1957) starring Doris Day, had proved popular with the Auckland general public. Consequently, the society felt confident that the stage musical would be a success. In order to save money by employing a smaller number of musicians in the orchestra, the committee asked Neil McGough, the musical director, to re-orchestrate The Pajama Game for thirteen players.\textsuperscript{466} Chappell’s, the copyright holders, gave permission but insisted that the re-orchestration was their property, and should be sent to them immediately after closing night.

As part of the advertising campaign, Rex Sayers, who was a television announcer, had organised for the AKTV2 “Late Show” on Saturday night to feature two songs from The Pajama Game. “Hey There” would be sung by the resident vocalist for the Late Show, whereas “Steam Heat” led by Irene Boorman who was playing Gladys, would be presented by the society.\textsuperscript{467} It was the first time the society had advertised on television. Despite a well-planned marketing campaign, a stellar cast, colourful costumes, tuneful music and excellent dancing The Pajama Game did not make a profit. This illustrates the unpredictability of showbusiness.

After much consideration, And So To Bed was chosen as the Auckland Festival production for 1968. The initial choice had been a music hall, but the Festival Society had considered that it was not “cultural” enough.\textsuperscript{468} A double cast, performing on alternate nights, was engaged for And So To Bed. The Festival Society required confirmation that the cast was of the highest calibre. Therefore, the operatic society committee informed the director that if any performer did not meet the high performance standard required, he or she would be precluded from performing. A television promotion with Cherry Raymond, a well known journalist, was organised for 18 March 1968, while a radio promotion was arranged for 9 April 1968. Audiences flocked to the production. The managing secretary of the Festival Society, W. Laird Thomson, congratulated the society on its great success.

The committee chose Can Can as the major production for 1968, with the intention of importing a leading lady from Australia.\textsuperscript{469} Jill Perryman and Sheila Bradley, both well known in New Zealand, were mooted. However, Robert Alderton, who was the director for the musical, stated that he was in touch with Daphne Payne who had played Nellie in

\textsuperscript{466} Committee minutes, 8 August 1967.
\textsuperscript{467} Boorman was a well known professional dancer and actress who had appeared in productions in Australia. She was not paid for her role as Gladys in Pajama Game.
\textsuperscript{468} Committee minutes, 5 December 1967.
\textsuperscript{469} Ibid.
Payne had married the American tenor William Lewis and was now living in New York, but would be visiting New Zealand with her husband in 1968. Both husband and wife were enjoying a successful operatic career. Alderton felt they would be interested in playing the leading roles of Etienne and La Mome Pistache. The offer was accepted by Payne and Lewis, at the rate of £100 per week plus accommodation, which included four weeks’ rehearsal and two weeks’ performance.

The dates for Can Can had been booked for some time by the society, but Williamson’s suddenly announced they wished to change the dates in favour of a professional troupe. This turn of events was not unusual, with professionals taking precedence over amateurs, regardless of any financial loss incurred. The operatic society, however, pointed out that they were paying overseas artistes to star in the show. Unusually, Williamson’s relented and commenced the season for its professional show in Christchurch, so that the society could retain its original dates in Auckland. This argues that the society had built up a notable reputation.

Nevertheless, there were ructions within the committee. Robert Alderton asked for permission to replace three people, who had quit the production for various reasons. He wished to re-cast the role of Boris and the understudies for Etienne and La Mome Pistache. With the exception of Rex Sayers who said it was not a wise decision, all the committee members agreed to the replacements in the cast. Sayers declared that under the circumstances he felt he was unable to continue as chairman, and resigned. He was urged to reconsider, but declined and left the meeting. Roy Severs was asked to take the chair.

Robert Alderton had organised an advertisement in the “Wait a Minim” programme and the Connoisseurs Club programme, as well as a story in the Weekly News with Dorothy Wiseman. Bill Leathwick had arranged for Lewis and Payne to be interviewed on AKTV2. Ticket prices were set at $2.50, and concessions at $2 for the sale of ten seats or more in the circle or stalls. There was much pre-show publicity, including a substantial article headed “Girl with Two Voices Back Home” (New Zealand Herald, 14 July 1968).

The article expounded at length on Payne’s ability to sing as a “true soprano (this voice trained in Auckland by celebrated teacher, Sister Mary Leo), and as a belt singer – her voice big, brassy, loud and rasping”. Can Can was well-received by the public and the critics, who commented on the “professional savoir faire” of Payne and Lewis (Auckland Star, 25 August 1968). The chairman congratulated Alderton on the success of Can Can.

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470 Committee minutes, 30 January 1968.
471 Committee minutes, 4 March 1968.
472 Committee minutes, 11 June 1968.
473 Committee minutes, 23 July 1968. Those were all prestigious advertising forums.
and submitted a motion that Alderton be invited to act as resident producer for 1969.\textsuperscript{474} The motion was carried.

As 1969 was the golden jubilee year for the society, it was decided to produce three musicals commencing with \textit{The Fantasticks}, a joint production with the Auckland Festival Society.\textsuperscript{475} \textit{The Fantasticks} featured an experienced cast including Raewyn Blade, a former member of the society who was domiciled in London and undertaking small roles in the West End. Blade was visiting her parents in Auckland, and was thus available to play the part of Luisa. In spite of Blade’s presence, the musical was not well-patronised, and resulted in a financial loss.

\textit{Show Boat} (1969) was chosen as the major production for the year to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the society, because it combined many of the “better aspects of musical comedy and was the forerunner of the modern day musical”.\textsuperscript{476} A cast of more than 120, one of the largest in the history of the society, appeared in the show (plate 17).

![Plate 17 Show Boat (1969), act 1 finale](image)

Plate 17 \textit{Show Boat} (1969), act 1 finale

by kind permission Auckland Musical Arts Trust

A “modern version” that streamlined the production was created: as the artistic team considered that the “great weakness” in \textit{Show Boat} was its second act which embraced a period of twenty-five years, a ballet and montage was devised to depict the time gap. In honour of the occasion, the society decided to approach two local professional singers to play the roles of Julie and Joe: Kiri Te Kanawa and Inia Te Wiata.\textsuperscript{477} Neither singer was available as they were appearing in other productions. Instead, Julie was performed by

\textsuperscript{474} Committee minutes, 15 September 1968.

\textsuperscript{475} No reason is given in the minutes for the choice of show. However, two committee members informally commented that it was one of their favourite shows.

\textsuperscript{476} \textit{Show Boat} (1969) programme.

\textsuperscript{477} Both Te Kanawa and Te Wiata have a Maori ancestry. In years to come, they would become international stars in the opera world.
Bette Spiro, whose dark colouring admirably suited the role, and Joe was played by Lucas Bunt, who sang the role in blackface.

Robert Alderton, the producer of Show Boat, invited the Kauri Maori Chorus to participate as the African American, or “coloured”, chorus. Initially, the conductor of the Kauri Maori Chorus was concerned about the possibility of racial discrimination against his choir by the Europeans in the cast. The chairman of the society, however, reassured him that there was no question of this. In fact, Maori and European worked together harmoniously.

The third production for the year, a cabaret style show with Archy and Mehitabel, a rock opera as the centrepiece, was staged in conjunction with Grafton Theatre at the 100-seat St Andrews Hall. Robert Alderton, who produced the show, also accompanied the singers to save costs. He admitted that his wife was fond of the stories of Don Marquis, on which Archy and Mehitabel was based. Therefore, he had wanted to stage the show. Alderton was an accomplished pianist who worked in a variety of daytime marketing jobs while pursuing his theatrical career on a part-time basis. However, he was keen to experiment and explore new theatrical avenues in Auckland, based on his overseas experience. Earlier in 1969, he had organised a group of young singers who performed with the operatic society to appear in floorshows in cabaret venues throughout Auckland. Alderton wrote the material. Although the performers were paid a small sum, all had fulltime day jobs, generally in the professional, administrative or retail sectors. The floorshows were organised to dovetail with operatic society shows.

Despite the fact that it had been a notable year for the society because it celebrated its fiftieth jubilee, not one of its productions was financially successful. The committee

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478 Minutes of meeting, 15 October 1968.
479 Ibid.
480 By the 1960s, many Maori were accommodated in large state housing areas in south Auckland. Rawiri Taonui in The New Zealand Herald supplement 26 August 2010, “Auckland Our Story: Our Sprawl 1950-1980s”, 20, states that Maori felt prejudice against them and that “parts of south Auckland were reminiscent of the American South” in that there was separate seating for Maori in movie theatres and separate sections allocated in public swimming pools. The author of this thesis, who spent her childhood living in a low socioeconomic area in the inner western suburbs of Auckland, has no recollection of this.
481 As cited in the Auckland Light Opera Club programme, Life with Father (1958). Grafton Theatre was founded in 1913 as the Grafton Shakespeare Society, but changed its name to the Grafton Shakespeare and Dramatic Society. In 1970, it claimed to be the longest-established amateur drama group in Auckland, but went into recess shortly after.
482 Personal interview with Robert Alderton, 8 May 2007. Alderton and his wife had spent several years in Sydney and London during the 1950s and early 1960s. In Sydney, Alderton worked as a pianist for the Channel Nine music programme and for J. C. Williamson’s, after which he moved to London. There he worked as an assistant editor for Geoffrey Handley-Taylor, a bibliographer; as a pianist for Dinely Rehearsal Studios; and as a producer of floorshows for a high-calibre restaurant. Alderton and his wife returned to Auckland in 1962.
483 Annual general meeting minutes, 16 March 1970.
did much soul-searching, citing reasons such as overspending on the budget for *Show Boat* and choosing a little-known musical like *The Fantasticks*. There were other factors in play, nevertheless, such as the alternative entertainment offered by television and the movies. Indeed, several of the performers who had appeared in *Archy and Mehitabel* were invited to participate in a New Year’s Eve television programme in 1969. It was the end of an era, as the society prepared to move from its home of fifty years.

**Conclusion**

The social and technological changes from 1945 to 1969 presented many challenges for the Auckland Operatic Society. Although the society attempted to extend its repertoire by introducing ballet, plays and revues, ultimately it reverted to presenting musicals. As a result of the urban sprawl, some operatic society members moved to outlying suburbs, in common with many Aucklanders. Suburban operatic societies were established, which encouraged performers and technical crews to stay in their own suburbs. That is not to say that people did not travel around the Auckland region to audition for various societies. Although the burgeoning suburban societies may have impacted detrimentally on the membership numbers of the Auckland Operatic Society, they did give performers greater opportunities. In order to counteract its diminishing membership base, the society organised more than one membership drive but met with limited success. It was able, nevertheless, to apply for financial grants to offset its deficits.

The 1960s heralded a new beginning with a large influx of young members and the staging of smaller shows in the Hall. In addition, the Auckland Operatic Society did cooperate with the Auckland Light Opera Club to stage a successful production of *The Belle of New York*. Initially, the society used radio to advertise its productions. However, in the 1960s, the society was able to use television effectively as an advertising forum for its productions. This was possible because several of the operatic society committee members worked for television and radio. However, the establishment of the Auckland Musical Arts Trust to safeguard the assets of the Auckland Operatic Society was the most significant decision.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Upholding Theatrical Traditions:
the Auckland Operatic Society 1970 to 1992

The Gog

This era, which was marked by the move to the old synagogue (the Gog) in Princes Street in 1970, would prove the most challenging in the history of the society. The minutes reflect an ever-increasing concern in regard to dwindling audience numbers and the diminution of the membership base. Arguably, this decline was due to the economic downturn in the New Zealand economy from the mid-1970s into the 1980s. Nevertheless, the society did mount a series of major musicals in His Majesty’s Theatre from 1976 to 1985. Indeed, The Great Waltz (1979), Annie (1981) and The Mikado (1985), proved the most financially successful in its history. Thus, there were other factors in play.

Television, suburban societies and the newly-established professional Mercury Theatre provided increasingly strong competition during the 1970s and beyond. Furthermore, professional theatre companies, particularly from Australia, visited Auckland in growing numbers. The Auckland Light Opera Club, too, was a major rival in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, the popular music industry continued to gain momentum.

Changes were made to the physical boundaries of Auckland as boroughs were amalgamated. By 1989 the Auckland region had been split into four cities: Auckland, North Shore, Waitakere and Manukau. Each of the four cities had its own mayor, council and agenda. Thus, the Auckland Operatic Society was grappling with an ever-changing bureaucracy, as well as with its own particular problems.

This chapter outlines the challenges faced by the society as it struggled with the high cost of maintaining the Gog, building a new theatre, coordinating a touring company and ultimately surrendering the lease on its premises, thus rendering itself homeless for six

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484 In 1984, there was a constitutional crisis in New Zealand because foreign exchange reserves were depleted: the dollar was devalued by twenty per cent, and floated for the first time in history. In October 1987, New Zealand was deeply affected by the global stock market crash.

485 The Mercury specialised in plays, but mounted one musical annually. There was a justifiable perception by amateur musical societies that Arts Council funding favoured professional theatre.

years. The impact of changes in technology, and the different types of theatre spaces to which the society was forced to adapt, are also addressed.

**New Beginnings**

As the relocation of its headquarters was a considerable expense, the committee employed a business manager to oversee its finances. Neil McGough, a professional musician, was appointed because of his vast experience with the Regional Arts Federation, the Musicians’ Union and other arts organisations.\(^{487}\) At the annual general meeting in 1970, a merger with Grafton Theatre was again mooted.\(^{488}\) However, some members argued that this would be of benefit only to Grafton Theatre. It was noted that local professional theatre, epitomised by the Mercury, had had a negative impact on all amateur societies in the inner city. After heated discussion, it was resolved that the society “should not under any circumstances merge with any other society but that the incoming committee could consider the formation of our own drama wing”.\(^{489}\) A drama wing was never established, nor did the society stage plays again until the 1990s.

In December 1970, the business manager confirmed that the society had had to raise an overdraft, as *Kismet* had recorded a substantial loss.\(^{490}\) He stated that an analysis of the *Kismet* accounts showed that the costs of the orchestra, crew and sets were too high.\(^{491}\) It was firmly resolved, therefore, that future overheads for productions should be carefully controlled. Moreover, it was decided to organise more social functions to underpin marketing expenditure. The business manager emphasised that it was vital for the society to retain its “present premium position in the city, rather than taking a step which would greatly reduce the society’s image in Auckland”.\(^{492}\) However, retaining premises in the city and maintaining a high-profile proved difficult.

**Community Image, Visibility and Camaraderie**

Ways to revitalise the society became the focus. In 1971, the chairman of the society urged caution in the choice of repertoire, because of ever-increasing royalty rates.\(^{493}\) He recommended also that the society re-assess its role in the performing arts arena, in view of competition from visiting overseas professional companies. The

\(^{487}\) Annual report, 16 March 1970.  
^{488} Annual general meeting minutes, 16 March 1970.  
^{489} Ibid.  
^{490} Financial report, 30 December 1970.  
^{491} The budget for *Kismet* is not available.  
^{492} Financial report, 30 December 1970.  
^{493} Annual report, 28 March 1971.
committee stressed that the society had played an important role in the cultural life of Auckland by providing outstanding entertainment on a regular basis for decades. Moreover, the society had supplied an outlet for amateurs, who had often reached a standard that had enabled them to become professional entertainers.\footnote{Annual report 28 March 1971.} This sentiment is in accord with the views put forward by Stebbins in regard to modern amateurism, whereby a person makes a pastime a central activity to the extent that he/she is able to become a professional.\footnote{Stebbins, “The Amateur: Two Sociological Definitions”, 582.}

In an effort to maintain a high standard of performance, a show manager was appointed on a show-by-show basis to assist in the smooth running of productions. Mr Les Maynard, a committee member, was the first appointee. Furthermore, to boost membership numbers, it was decided to create a friendlier, club-like atmosphere with more informal gatherings.\footnote{Annual report, 28 March 1971. Les Maynard’s spouse, Joan, headed the wardrobe team of the society for many years.} The committee seemed to have developed a heightened awareness that social networking was vital to the survival of the society; that by improving their community image they would increase their visibility in the Auckland region. This is a different attitude from that adopted in the era from 1919 to 1946 when elitism appeared to reign, as was evident from the stringent conditions that applied to gaining membership.

At the 1972 annual meeting, the chairman reported that the past year had been one of the most difficult in the history of the society in terms of attracting an audience.\footnote{Annual report, 19 March 1972.} He pointed out, however, that in the central city other amateur musical groups such as the Auckland Light Opera Club, the Junior Symphony and the Choral Society had also suffered. It seems that a combination of social changes may have been responsible. A reading of the minutes confirms that one factor was the growing influence of the Arts Council, which had encouraged the establishment of professional groups over the preceding ten years.

During 1972, the Arts Council commissioned Devon Biggs to analyse expenditure in the New Zealand Arts sector from 1971 to 1972. The report confirmed that door sales and subscriptions accounted for the majority of earnings of city-based theatrical societies.\footnote{Ibid.} Over and above that, miscellaneous income averaged only 1.8 per cent of the total. The Auckland Operatic Society, nonetheless, was hopeful of defying the trend indicated in the Devon Biggs report by boosting miscellaneous income to twenty-five per
cent of the total. Accordingly, various plans to augment income were implemented. First, a social committee was established to organise fundraising social activities. Second, newsletters promoting those activities were sent regularly to members. Third, members were offered a discount to organise block bookings through the society for various professional theatrical productions imported by Williamson’s. The operatic society received a certain percentage from Williamson’s for coordinating those bookings. However, finances did not improve markedly.

The Touring Company

Despite the fact that the Auckland Operatic Society wished to maintain a high profile in the city, it was difficult financially to mount a production in His Majesty’s Theatre. Accordingly, the society decided to establish a touring troupe under the banner of “Auckland Music Theatre Company”. This operated for three years from 1971. The committee felt that they could save money by staging productions in country venues, because hireage fees were cheaper than in Auckland. Subsequently, twenty-four experienced members, who had reached a “professional” standard of performance and/or technical expertise as decided by the operatic society committee, were invited to join the company. The founding director was Robert Alderton.

The company normally staged two or three weekend performances in outlying Auckland suburbs, as well as small towns throughout the North Island. To finance the productions, sponsors in local towns were requested to pay $600 in advance to the touring group, followed by twenty-five per cent of the gross takings over and above the first $600. Publicity and associated costs were met by the host town. Initially, there were some problems as members adjusted to different conditions from those pertaining to performances in Auckland. Consequently, the society decided to implement “a modern industrial relations theory” by setting up a touring management team consisting of a show manager, the producer and an elected delegate of the cast.

In an interview with the arts critic, Bute Hewes (Sunday Herald, 26 March 1972), two committee members, Derek Firth and Neil McGough, justified the decision to form a

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499 Action sub-committee minutes, 12 July 1971. Performers were not paid a salary or fee.
500 Ibid. People who offered a range of skills, such as performing as well as choreographing, for instance, were chosen. In retrospect, however, the society acknowledged that the decision to invite, rather than audition, members for the touring company was, perhaps, at odds with its earlier resolution to create a more welcoming atmosphere for members.
501 Personal interview with Robert Alderton, 8 May 2007. Alderton resigned in 1971, because he was offered the fulltime position of executive director with the fledgling professional Mercury Theatre. Alderton remained in professional theatre. Thus, he graduated from amateur director to professional.
toursing company. They explained that there was a niche market in some outlying areas and smaller towns which did not have ready access to theatre. Firth and McGough reiterated the views that had been expressed in the minutes with respect to competition from professional theatre and suburban societies. It was their opinion that Auckland had outgrown the amateur theatre movement, which had provided much of its entertainment over the decades. As Firth stated (Sunday Herald, 26 March 1972):

I’m sure that eventually, when cities like Wellington and Christchurch and Hamilton grow to the size of Auckland, their operatic societies will find the same. . . . Anybody in Auckland who wants to go to an operatic society production will find excellent shows on the North Shore, Howick, Titirangi and New Lynn. So why should they come in from these outlying areas just to see a show in Queen Street? Auckland has now grown in size and sophistication to the point where people no longer expect to find an amateur show in Queen Street, any more than they would in the centre of Sydney or Broadway in New York or the West End of London.

While touring had seemed a good solution to financial problems, expenses were heavier than anticipated. First, out-of-town audience numbers did not always meet budget targets, which resulted in financial losses on some productions. Second, as members of the company were living away from home, normally overnight, they were out of pocket for accommodation and meals. Transport was provided. At a committee meeting it was resolved “that the company pay accommodation and dinner, bed and breakfast when touring and a minimum of a $10 lump sum at the end of the Auckland area season”. 503

The touring company was a positive concept in terms of mounting shows on a small scale outside of Auckland, and providing performance opportunities. It did not, however, address fundamental long-term issues such as boosting membership numbers and nurturing young talent. Indeed, there was some concern that existing financial members who were not invited to join the touring company could feel slighted. 504 Indeed, the troupe did not generate as much income as had been anticipated, with some tours recording a loss. 505 The society was aware, too, that its audience base in Auckland was diminishing because it was not performing musicals in its home town: it must be borne in mind that the Auckland Light Opera Club was still mounting productions in the inner city at this time. Thus in 1974, the touring company was disbanded.

**Hard Times and Rival Societies**

From 1974 to 1980, under the chairmanship of Mr Les Maynard who had considerable business skills, the society attempted to regain momentum. In March 1974, 506

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504 Annual report, 19 March 1972.
the chairman reported that a dearth of skilled management people on the committee, rather than a lack of talented performers, was the main problem.\textsuperscript{506} Consequently, the advertising and promotion of shows had been inadequate, which resulted in poor ticket sales and led to financial losses. In an effort to strengthen its management, the committee was restructured to include several subcommittees: publicity, reorganisation and rules, hireage, membership and subscriptions, properties, forward planning and social.\textsuperscript{507} Heads of departments for lighting, sound, wardrobe, properties and set were organised on a show-by-show basis. To assist with the workload, an assistant secretary was appointed to administer the subscriptions and to record minutes. Moreover, any executive member who performed in a show, other than the business manager and publicity officer, was required to stand down for the period concerned. The justification was that the executive committee should concentrate solely on administration and promotion.

The financial woes continued. Rising inflation resulted in increased hireage costs for theatres, and higher ticket prices. For instance, the Centennial Theatre had raised its prices from $75 to $100 per night.\textsuperscript{508} Although the society had decided to mount \textit{Robert and Elizabeth} at the Centennial Theatre in 1975, it lacked funds. Therefore, four committee members agreed to act as guarantors at the rate of $100 each to subsidise the production.\textsuperscript{509} This was a considerable amount: at the time, the weekly salary for a secretary in Auckland, for example, was approximately $120 per week. Consequently, the offer of a guarantee indicated a great deal of commitment, because it was not certain that the musical would make a profit. As it transpired, the four members were reimbursed.

The advent of colour television and a second channel in Auckland increased the competition for audiences. As noted, attracting audiences into the city was becoming more difficult. Nevertheless, a new inner-city theatrical society, called Pilgrim Productions, was formed in 1978. The society was an ecumenical one which focused on “plays, musicals and art forms of artistic expression for the advancement of Christian values”.\textsuperscript{510} Its headquarters were located in a Methodist church at 78 Pitt Street, in the central business district. The committee consisted of members from mainstream churches in Auckland. \textit{Ride! Ride!} (1978), a musical play that is based on the life experiences of John Wesley,

\textsuperscript{506} Annual report, 24 March 1974.
\textsuperscript{507} Committee minutes, 8 April 1974.
\textsuperscript{508} Annual report, 21 March 1976.
\textsuperscript{509} Committee minutes, 15 December 1974. In the interests of privacy, the four members are not named in this thesis.
\textsuperscript{510} \url{http://www.pilgrimproductions.org.nz} (accessed 22 February 2012). Pilgrim Productions continues into 2009 and beyond.
the founder of the Methodist Church, was the first production. It was staged at Centennial Theatre.

As a regular activity, the society performed gospel-based one act plays that replaced the sermon. A committee member, Bruce Weston, wrote many of the scripts. However, as the society was an associate member of RADIUS, a religious drama society in Great Britain, scripts were periodically hired from that source. Pilgrim Productions toured around Auckland, performing the plays at various churches. Nonetheless, their major productions, such as Godspell and Pippin, were normally staged in smaller theatres throughout Auckland. Although Pilgrim Productions could be considered a marginal theatrical society because of its focus on gospel-based musicals and plays, mainstream directors and performers from other societies did participate.

Suburban societies found new ways of involving locals in their productions. Centrestage Theatre, for example, which was located in the seaside suburb of Orewa on the upper north shore of Auckland, was populated by many young families. Thus, in 1980, Centrestage established a youth theatre group with classes for young children, teenagers and young adults. This was a wise move: Mrs Pat Shanks, founder of the junior theatre, stated that “many of our young actors and crew have continued in the theatre while others have become an enthusiastic audience rather than participants”. Centrestage continues to thrive.

The Auckland Operatic Society, however, celebrated its Diamond Jubilee with dinner at an exclusive dine-and-dance venue called Trillo’s in 1979. It was well supported by members. Bruce Duncan, a previous chairman who now lived in Australia, had travelled to Auckland for the occasion.

The Bowen Studio Theatre

The new Bowen Studio Theatre at the Gog was finally opened in 1980. Sponsorship to pay for equipment for the theatre was sought by the society as the building cost had been estimated at $130,000. During the previous year, Les Maynard had approached seventy-three businesses for donations, but with little success. He had, nonetheless, arranged new curtaining for the theatre at forty per cent discount.

512 Fifty: 1956–2006 Reflections. [Centrestage fiftieth jubilee booklet], 17.
513 Ibid., 17. The youth theatre still exists in 2009. Centrestage established a trust to safeguard its assets in 1990.
514 Annual general minutes, 25 March 1979.
Several sub-committees were formed to manage various operational aspects: the Bowen complex, maintenance, hireage, ways and means, and forward-planning. The most lucrative source of income was from hireage. Therefore, members volunteered their time and labour to re-organise the costumes of the society in five rooms at 21 Princes Street: older costumes were disposed of and useable ones were cleaned. The society acknowledged that with the pending introduction of a new government Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 1985, it was difficult to project the cost of presenting live theatre. Therefore, careful forward-planning and budgeting were imperative. It was proposed that the secretary and treasurer be paid an honorarium of $200 per year each because of their increased workload, but the offer was declined.

The next two years were unsettling: the Gog was expensive to maintain, and it had been mooted that His Majesty’s Theatre would be demolished. Nevertheless, in its quest for professionalism, the society had organised tuition by the British director, Alexander Bridge, who had presented workshops in all facets of directing theatre productions throughout New Zealand. In addition, a group of twenty-five members had arranged, at their own expense, to fly to Sydney for the weekend of 27/28 July 1985 to view Cats. Although this was a social occasion, members were interested also in seeing new theatre trends. This reinforces the point made by Stebbins, that amateurs often form the audience for professionals.

Amateurs and Professionals and the Arts Advocates Group

In 1986 the Auckland Operatic Society was invited to attend the inaugural meeting of a newly-formed group called Arts Administrators, which had been established by private individuals with an interest in the arts. The aim of the group was to organise a collective voice on arts issues by bringing together the administrators in both the visual and performing arts, regardless of their professional or amateur status. Thus, if Auckland as a region needed funding for the arts the group would apply collectively, rather than separately, as this would result in a greater amount being received. Some of the professionals that were represented included the Auckland Philharmonia, Opera New Zealand, the Auckland Theatre Company, the New Zealand Ballet Company, SkyCity Theatre and North Shore Council. Ian Gardiner represented the Auckland Operatic Society in his capacity as vice-chairman.

516 Annual report, 6 April 1986.
In 1990, Arts Administrators became Arts Advocates. Gardiner was elected to the executive committee. The biggest grant received by Arts Advocates was approximately $500,000, when the government dissolved the Auckland Regional Council.\footnote{Personal interview with Ian Gardiner, 19 January 2008.} It had been the intent to keep the money in trust with an entity such as the Auckland Savings Bank, which would release the money to professional groups as required. In turn, councils could then grant more funding to community-based groups including the Auckland Operatic Society. It was not to be. Instead, the government divided the money between the seven regions of Auckland, based on population, with funding to be allocated to significant regional arts groups, professional and amateur. Although the Auckland and Manukau Councils pooled their resources and formed an arts committee to allocate the money, the funds were distributed mainly to professional groups.

**Wandering Minstrels**

The year of 1986, nevertheless, was overshadowed by the impending move of the headquarters of the society to an, as yet, unknown location. As the high maintenance costs of the Gog had proved unsustainable, the society surrendered its lease to the Auckland City Council on the undertaking that new premises would be found within eighteen months.\footnote{Annual report, 5 April 1987.} As 1986 drew to a close, the Bowen complex was shut down.

The society moved out of the Gog by 14 February 1987 to comply with the conditions imposed by council, and was officially homeless. Committee meetings were now held at the homes of members. However, the annual general meeting was held at the Green Lane Hospital hall in Epsom.\footnote{The secretary of the society was a long-term employee of the hospital and organised the use of the hall gratis.} Sandra Sewell, who had served as secretary for twenty years, was elected a life member. Her award was carried by acclamation.\footnote{Annual report, 5 April 1987.} Members queried whether nowadays it was appropriate for the mayor of Auckland to be appointed as patron or president of the society. The chairman reminded members that those were honorary positions only, and were awarded to people who had been connected with the society or had an interest in the arts.

During 1987 the committee was informed that Auckland City Council had allocated a site for the society at 40 Meola Road, Western Springs, next door to Motat (Museum of Transport and Technology). Council assured the trust that it would be only a few months before building could begin on the site, but the slow-turning wheels of bureaucracy
deemed otherwise. Morale was low within the ranks of the society. In part, this was due to the pending demolition of His Majesty’s Theatre during the New Year weekend in 1988. Many rallies had been held to save the theatre, but to no avail.523 The demolition was a severe blow to the arts community, because “the Maj”, as it was affectionately known, was the main performing venue for both professional and amateur productions. The entrance to His Majesty’s Theatre was in Queen Street (the corner of Durham Street West), at the rear of His Majesty’s Arcade, which housed some exclusive small shops (plate 18).

After the New Year weekend in 1988, Auckland, the largest city in New Zealand, was without a central performing venue. In an effort to raise morale and rekindle the community spirit within the ranks, the social committee was resurrected under the name “Entertainment 10”: there were ten people in the team.524 By organising social functions, the committee also aimed to raise money for the many extras that would be required for the new theatre, be it an act drop, a chandelier or other items that would make the new

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524 Ibid.
theatre “the home that we have always dreamed of”. The new social committee was launched with a successful cocktail party held on Saturday, 16 July 1988, at old government house, Princes Street, in the grounds of the University of Auckland opposite the Gog. The social committee organised several such functions to raise funds.

Work finally commenced in July 1988 at Meola Road. The weatherboard hall at 31 Princes Street, known as the “pink shed” because of its colour, was finally moved on to the site. Groups of volunteers cleaned and waterproofed the building, prior to the possessions of the society being retrieved from farflung corners of Auckland. In May 1989, a team of willing helpers moved the wardrobe of costumes from 21 Princes Street to Meola Road. Some costumes had been recently donated to the wardrobe by the Auckland Light Opera Club, which had succumbed to financial problems and disbanded.

In an effort to improve its working framework, the society commissioned the Alphergy Consulting Group to carry out a feasibility study. Although the study was duly accomplished, the committee was disappointed because of the lack of new information. The chairman of the trust resigned, as he believed that new leadership was needed to reactivate enthusiasm. He queried also whether his own vision for a theatre at Meola Road still reflected the aspirations of members of the operatic society.

Most disappointing of all, the Auckland Savings Bank declined funding for a theatre. In light of this, much discussion ensued at the annual general meeting in May 1990 as to the size and structure of the new theatre. One member suggested that the society should be more realistic in its aspirations and build a theatre without a flytower, as the current economic climate was not a good one for fundraising. Another member proposed leasing a property as a temporary theatre for a short time. However, the chairman of the trust stated that if funds were used for leasing, insufficient interest would accrue for maintenance: based on past history, the society could not depend upon profits from shows to pay rates and other expenses.

After further discussion, consensus was reached on erecting a simple structure that could be called “home”, and used as a rehearsal space. Eventually, this would become the auditorium of a theatre when there was sufficient money to build. John Fausett suggested that a subcommittee be formed to look into suitable proposals for Meola Road. After

526 Auckland Musical Arts Trust annual report, 6 May 1990.
527 Ibid.
528 Annual general meeting minutes, 6 May 1990.
529 Ibid.
further discussion, the Meola Road Working Party was formed under the leadership of John Fausett and Sue Skinner.

On 25 June 1990 the Working Party met with the committee of the society to make its recommendation, which was that a concrete block shell of some 256 square metres be erected.\(^{530}\) The committee accepted the report. However, when the report was presented to the trust, it became apparent that there was insufficient funding. A detailed analysis of the cost of various structures was conducted. It was deduced by the trust that Econobuilt, a building company, would provide “the most covered area per dollar”.\(^{531}\) Viability, however, depended on the volunteer labour of members to lay floors and install internal partitioning.

The first priority of the trust was to acquire a lease over the Meola Road site, but council’s approval for subdivision of the land had expired.\(^{532}\) It seemed that this was a mere technicality, and could be easily resolved. That was not the case: the new Resource Management Act required the plan to be submitted to the District Land Registrar for approval of the amalgamation of titles. It was now five years since the society had executed the agreement, and surrendered the lease on the old synagogue. In terms of this agreement, Auckland City Council had undertaken to provide within eighteen months an alternative site on which to build a theatre. Granted, a site had been acquired, but, owing to bureaucratic obstacles, a building had not been erected.

**Home in the Western Suburbs**

A draft lease for the Meola Road site was finally received in June 1991.\(^{533}\) In the meantime, Paul Noble, the chairman of the trust, had obtained building quotes. On 27 July 1991 it was resolved at a trust meeting to take the commercial risk of committing $150,000 to building, although the lease was only in draft form. The sum of $40,000 was placed in reserve, to provide for the maintenance of the trust’s present and future assets for a period of five years, if needed. The operatic society agreed to provide a bridging loan of $18,000 for GST at no interest, as well as a donation of $6,000 towards the project. The trust voted unanimously to proceed after a firm quotation from Econobuilt had been received.\(^{534}\)

\(^{530}\) Committee minutes, 24 July 1990.
\(^{531}\) Auckland Musical Arts Trust annual report, 28 April 1991.
\(^{533}\) Auckland Musical Arts Trust annual report, 18 April 1993.
\(^{534}\) Ibid.
The saga continued, however, as several parties were required to sign the lease, and all wished to ensure that their interests would not suffer: the Auckland Musical Arts Trust, Auckland City, Motat and the Department of Conservation. Fortunately, the mayor of Auckland, Mr Les Mills, who was patron of the society, had attended the 1992 annual general meeting and agreed that the trust and the society “had been given the run around”. Thus, he was instrumental in organising the lease. Auckland City planning consent, subject to the trust providing 21 car parks, was received on 24 August 1992.

An application was made to the Auckland Savings Bank Trust for funds to assist with building costs. The sum of $90,000 was requested for heating, lining, additional lighting, forecourt completion, porches and access ramps. In fact, the trust received $91,500. The Auckland City Property Manager signed the building permit application, and work began on the site in September 1992. Econobuilt erected the shell of the structure, while Paul Noble supervised a volunteer workforce to assist at weekends and three nights a week. The trust anticipated this would be only the first stage in a two-stage development. Stage two was for a 300-to-400-seat theatre to be built on the area occupied by the pink shed and carpark.

It was a defining moment in the history of the society when members received their notice for the 1993 annual general meeting: “The 73rd Annual General Meeting of the Auckland Operatic Society Inc. will be held on Sunday 18th April 1993 at our place 40 Meola Road (entrance from Motions Road), Western Springs”.

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### The Repertoire 1970 to 1992

The American musical continued its ascendancy in the repertoire of the Auckland Operatic Society (table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Composer and Lyricist</th>
<th>National Origin</th>
<th>World Premiere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td><em>A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum</em></td>
<td>Sondheim</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Kismet</em></td>
<td>Forrest/Wright (Borodin)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1953</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td><em>Palace of Varieties Music Hall</em></td>
<td>Devised by Maggie Wright and Robert Alderton</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Kiss Me Kate</em></td>
<td>Porter</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum</em></td>
<td>Sondheim</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td><em>Zorba</em></td>
<td>Kander/Ebb</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>And So To Bed</em></td>
<td>Ellis</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td><em>Fiddler on the Roof</em></td>
<td>Bock/Harnick</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td><em>Finian’s Rainbow</em></td>
<td>Lane/Harburg</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1947</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>MGM: Memories Gone Mad (revue)</em></td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1974</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Carnival</em></td>
<td>Merrill</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1961</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td><em>Robert and Elizabeth</em></td>
<td>Grainer/Miller</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1964</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Carousel</em></td>
<td>Rodgers/Hammerstein II</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1943</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Calamity Jane</em></td>
<td>Fain/Webster</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1959</td>
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<td>1976</td>
<td><em>Oliver</em></td>
<td>Bart</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1960</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>The Boyfriend</em></td>
<td>Wilson</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1953</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td><em>An Evening with ... (revue)</em></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>UK/USA</td>
<td>1977</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>My Fair Lady</em></td>
<td>Loewe/Lerner</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1956</td>
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<td><em>Once Upon a Mattress</em></td>
<td>Rodgers/Barer</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1959</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>From Noel to Cole Revue</em></td>
<td>Devised by Marion Glew</td>
<td>UK/USA</td>
<td>1977</td>
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<td>1978</td>
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<td>USA</td>
<td>1964</td>
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<td><em>Salad Days</em></td>
<td>Slade/Reynolds</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1954</td>
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<td><em>H.M.S. Pinafore</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1878</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Company</em></td>
<td>Sondheim</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1970</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td><em>The Great Waltz</em></td>
<td>Johann Strauss senior/Johann Strauss junior/ Korngold/Wright/Brown</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1934</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Hello Dolly!</em></td>
<td>Herman</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1964</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Sixty Glorious Years</em></td>
<td>Devised by Ted Bryant/Brian O’Connor/Sandra Sewell</td>
<td>UK/USA</td>
<td>1979</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td><em>Oh, What a Lovely War</em></td>
<td>Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Hans Christian Andersen</em></td>
<td>Loesser</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Tap and All That (revue)</em></td>
<td>Devised by Val Wadsworth</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1974</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>A Christmas Carol</em></td>
<td>Menken/Ahrens</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1970</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td><em>Lock Up Your Daughters</em></td>
<td>Johnson/Bart</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1959</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>The Mikado</em></td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1885</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Annie</em></td>
<td>Strouse/Charmin</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1976</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Revue-ing the Situation</em></td>
<td>Devised by Maggie Wright</td>
<td>UK/USA</td>
<td>1981</td>
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</table>

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537 Wright and Alderton were both members of the committee, and directed shows.
538 The revue was organised by committee members.
539 Glew was a committee member and performer.
540 Bryant, O’Connor and Sewell were performers and members of the committee.
541 Wadsworth was a member of the committee, and a choreographer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Composer and Lyricist</th>
<th>National Origin</th>
<th>World Premiere</th>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>The Gondoliers</td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1889</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pal Joey</td>
<td>Rodgers/Hart</td>
<td>USA</td>
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<td>Sullivan/Gilbert/Taylor</td>
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<td>Forrest/Wright/Grieg</td>
<td>USA</td>
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<td>I Do! I Do!</td>
<td>Schmidt/Jones</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1966</td>
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<td>The Fantasticks</td>
<td>Schmidt/Jones</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1960</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Trumps (revue)</td>
<td>Devised by Ian Laird&lt;sup&gt;542&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>UK/USA</td>
<td>1984</td>
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<td>Strouse/Charnin</td>
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<td>Where's Charley?</td>
<td>Loesser</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1948</td>
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<td>Amahl and the Night Visitors</td>
<td>Menotti</td>
<td>USA</td>
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<td>Jack the Ripper</td>
<td>Pember/De Marne</td>
<td>UK</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor</td>
<td>Webber/Rice</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1968</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dreamcoat</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>USA</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>Jesus Christ Superstar</td>
<td>Lloyd Webber/Rice</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1971</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>Little Shop of Horrors</td>
<td>Menken/Ashman</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1982</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Oliver!</td>
<td>Bart</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1960</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>Kander/Ebb</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1975</td>
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<td>Hair</td>
<td>MacDermot/Ragni/Rado</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1967</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>Guys and Dolls</td>
<td>Loesser</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1950</td>
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Of the 48 musicals, 32 (67%) were American and 16 (33%) were British. For the first time in the history of the society, the musicals were exclusively American and British. Although the society was homeless for some years, the number of productions continued to rise: in 1978, 1980, 1981 and 1983, four productions were mounted annually.

Kenrick claims that on Broadway and the West End in the 1970s there was an intense three-way competition for stylistic dominance in musical theatre between the rock, concept and conventional post-<i>Oklahoma!</i> book musicals.<sup>543</sup> Amongst other musicals, he cites <i>Company</i> (1970), <i>Jesus Christ Superstar</i> (1971), <i>Chicago</i> (1975), <i>Annie</i> (1976), <i>The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas</i> (1978) and <i>Little Shop of Horrors</i> (1982) as examples. The Auckland Operatic Society staged all those musicals between 1978 and 1991. Kenrick expounds also on the “nostalgia epidemic”, which resulted in revivals of <i>My Fair Lady</i> (1976), <i>Fiddler on the Roof</i> (1976) and <i>Hello Dolly!</i> (1978), on Broadway and in the West End.<sup>544</sup> Those three musicals were staged by the Auckland Operatic Society in the 1970s.

<sup>542</sup> Laird was a member of the committee, and an accompanist.
<sup>543</sup> Kenrick, <i>Musical Theatre: A History</i>, 318.
<sup>544</sup> Ibid., 334.
The 1970s

The society staged *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1970) in the Town Hall Concert Chamber. In the programme, Derek Firth, the chairman of the society, noted proudly that for the third consecutive year the society was participating in the Auckland Festival, and that the choice of *Forum* was “in line with the Society’s policy of presenting musicals which are new to this city”. As the minutes are not available, it is unclear whether there were other reasons for choosing this musical. Nevertheless, Robert Alderton, the director, did comment informally that he much admired Sondheim’s music. Therefore, he may have been instrumental in choosing *Forum* as he was a committee member at the time. The show recorded a profit of $652.97, with half the proceeds being paid to the Auckland Arts Festival committee. Costs were minimal: the orchestra consisted of piano and drums, and performers wore the same costume throughout the show. The one set was built from existing stock (plate 19).

![Plate 19: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum (1970), finale](author's photograph)

On the other hand, *Kismet* (1970), which was staged in His Majesty’s Theatre with lavish costumes and sets, was not a success financially. Patronage was well below expectations, despite an intensive marketing campaign and the inclusion of some well known personalities in the cast. For instance, Merv Smith, a high-profile Auckland radio announcer, played the role of the Wazir. In addition, the costumes for Lalume had been designed and made by Vinka Lucas, an illustrious New Zealand designer. As the society

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546 Alderton, who is a notable pianist, stated: “Sondheim has been my greatest revelation, has opened me up artistically with his wonderful intellectual music, his storylines, his lyrics; he is my god. I can play a Sondheim piece on the piano a thousand times and always find something different in the text somewhere”. Personal interview with Robert Alderton, 8 May 2007.
547 Income and expenditure account, 30 December 1970.
found itself once more in straitened financial circumstances, it would be six years before it mounted a production in His Majesty’s Theatre.

The Auckland Light Opera Club, the society’s inner-city rival, continued to present musicals in the city, although not always at His Majesty’s Theatre. \textit{The Gondoliers} (1970) was mounted at the 350-seat Centennial Theatre, approximately three kilometres from the city. This was followed by \textit{Pink Champagne} (1970) at His Majesty’s Theatre. The Club had staged \textit{The Merry Widow} with notable success in 1969, and considered that \textit{Pink Champagne}, which was an adaptation of the former show, would be equally successful.\footnote{Personal interview with Doreen Donnell, 15 August 2007.} This proved to be the case.

Suburban societies, too, were thriving. There was a growing trend for performers to audition for various societies, as many people now owned cars and public transport had improved. In previous decades, many performers had been content to appear in the chorus of musicals year after year, sometimes alternating with playing small parts for the society, but this was no longer the case. A glance at the productions of three suburban societies in the Auckland region in 1970 reveals that the repertoire was similar to that of the operatic society. The Centrestage Theatre Company and the Pukekohe Light Opera Club, respectively, staged \textit{Old Tyme Music Hall} and \textit{Show Boat}.

A third group, the Papakura Theatre Club, staged \textit{Little Mary Sunshine}. It is of interest that one of the Auckland Operatic Society cast members of \textit{Forum} (1970) performed the female lead in the Papakura production, while Ray Dormer who played the role of Erronius in \textit{Forum}, directed \textit{Little Mary Sunshine}. Dormer had been instrumental in founding the Papakura Theatre Club, which had commenced as a drama night class. He worked with many societies in Auckland, and was convinced that the high standard set by amateur theatre had assisted in raising the standard of professional theatre.\footnote{Telephone interview with Ray Dormer, 4 May 2007.} Dormer entered the professional theatre arena in 1971.

In the meantime, the touring arm of the Auckland Operatic Society, known as Auckland Music Theatre Company, commenced its activities. During 1971 and 1972, two musicals per tour were mounted: one was staged on Saturday night and one on Sunday afternoon. From 1973, only one musical was staged (but performed twice).\footnote{Telephone interview with Ray Dormer, 4 May 2007.} Performers in the troupe doubled as principals and chorus. The orchestra consisted of piano and drums. Sets were designed in one piece, reversible and non-moving, eliminating the need...
for a large stage crew. Costumes were produced on a very small budget. The company mounted six productions in all: *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1971), *Kiss Me Kate* (1971), *Zorba* (1972), *And So to Bed* (1972), *Fiddler on the Roof* (1973) and *Finian’s Rainbow* (1974). After touring a show to country towns, the company tended to mount one performance in the Auckland Town Hall Concert Chamber or a similar smaller venue.

Members of the touring company generally have affectionate memories of the era, recollecting it as a time of great challenges, as well as a good training ground. As Maggie Wright, a foundation member of the touring company recalls:

> We rehearsed two shows, took them out into the highways and byways of the North Island. We had the same cast. The crew was usually two people, who went down on a Friday night to say, Te Awamutu . . . to put the show into the local hall . . . and light it. The company arrived on the Saturday morning. We did a quick run through, played the matinee and Saturday evening performance of one show, and overnight changed it round, and then on the Sunday afternoon played the other show and came home.  

It is clear that a high degree of commitment in terms of time and energy was needed: this was an amateur troupe, the members of which had fulltime day jobs. Wright directed five of the touring company musicals. In all, she directed no less than twenty-six musicals for the society, an unequalled record, and was the first female chairperson of the society from 1984 to 1993.

By 1974, nevertheless, the touring company had served its purpose: it was time to reaffirm the presence of the society in Auckland. In 1975, the society staged *Carousel* in the Town Hall Concert Chamber, followed by *Robert and Elizabeth* as the Auckland Arts Festival production at Centennial Theatre. It was resolved to invite a well known local singer, either Elizabeth Hellawell or Malvina Major, to play the role of Elizabeth. However, Hellawell was fully committed with other productions, and Major requested $150 per performance plus accommodation expenses. As the projected budget for *Robert and Elizabeth* was $3,040, Major’s fee was prohibitive. (The director and musical director were each paid $150, while the choreographer was paid $25.) Subsequently, auditions were held, and a member of the touring company, Sherrin Scelly, was cast in the role of Elizabeth. The musical was a success, and recorded a profit of $552.76.

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551 Interview with Maggie Wright, 17 May 2007.
552 During the 1960s and 1970s, a Monday-to-Friday working week from nine to five was fairly standard.
553 Wright, who was originally a performer, served on the committee of the society from 1968 to 2003. She directed many plays and musicals for other societies throughout New Zealand. Several members of the touring company are still actively involved with the society in 2009.
554 Committee minutes, 15 December 1974.
555 Ibid.
Nevertheless, the time had come to mount a production in His Majesty’s Theatre. The musical *Pickwick* was chosen. As a drawcard, the committee resolved to invite a famous performer from overseas to play the leading role. The Welsh singer Harry Secombe was approached, but he was not available.\(^{557}\) Subsequently, the society decided to stage *Half a Sixpence*, and invited several well known performers to play the lead, but all declined: Tommy Steele, a famous English performer; John Farnham, an Australian pop singer; and Ray Woolf, a popular New Zealand entertainer.\(^{558}\)

After much consideration, the society staged *Oliver!* (1976), using local talent. Expenditure on costumes and set was minimal, because the society had received a generous offer from the Hamilton Operatic Society: in return for a donation, rather than a hireage fee, costumes and a revolving set would be made available to the Auckland Operatic Society.\(^{559}\) The revolve can be seen clearly in act 2, scene 1, which features the Three Cripples Public House, against a painted backdrop of London (plate 20).

![Plate 20](image)

*Plate 20* Oliver! (1976), act 2, scene 1, The Three Cripples Public House with Bill Sykes (centre stage) and Nancy (stage right)

by kind permission Auckland Musical Arts Trust

Brian O’Connor, who directed *Oliver!* observed that it was the first time the society had staged a major musical with a set of this type:

> It was a scaffolding type set on a revolve, very open, very sparse. We did *Oliver!* ten or so years after it was originally premiered, and we were using a copy of the original set. It was exactly the same as Broadway and London saw in the original productions. It was completely different from the type of shows that had been staged before. It was a one-piece set that moved. Now, of course, it’s commonplace.\(^{560}\)

\(^{557}\) Committee minutes, 20 May 1975.  
\(^{558}\) Committee minutes, 24 June 1975.  
\(^{559}\) Committee minutes, 29 July 1975.  
\(^{560}\) Personal interview with Brian O’Connor, 15 May 2007.
The marketing for the musical reached new heights, which resulted in good box office takings. As well as pre-show publicity in the *New Zealand Herald, Auckland Star* and suburban newspapers, both Radio New Zealand and television provided free advertising.\(^{561}\) While newspaper reviews (*New Zealand Herald, 23 April 1976*) criticised performers for not projecting their voices, audiences flocked to the production:

Big Welcome for ‘Oliver’. After several years of absence from the stage of His Majesty’s Theatre, amateur light opera returned there last night when the Auckland Music Theatre Company gave the opening performance of a short season of Lionel Bart’s ‘Oliver’... It received a warm welcome from a well-disposed audience, who may not have heard some of the spoken lines and more of the sung ones, but obviously appreciated the many good points of Brian O’Connor’s production. A clear winner among the solos last night was “As Long As He Needs Me”... from Leone Horner, whose Nancy is the best sustained role.

The review was written by L. C. M. Saunders, a music and theatre critic who was also a music teacher at a prestigious Auckland high school.\(^{562}\) Saunders critiqued theatre productions for decades.

The subsequent major production, *My Fair Lady* (1977), directed by Brian O’Connor, was highly successful. It starred two well known local performers, Louise Malloy as Eliza, and Bill Leathwick as Higgins. Auditions were held in accordance with the normal practice of the society. The set, which had been used by professional companies, was hired from Williamson’s and, while the cast was a stellar one, perhaps the impressive set was a “star” in its own right. The library scene was the greatest attraction (plate 21).

\[^{561}\text{Publicity and Advertising Department report, May 1976.}\]
\[^{562}\text{During the 1960s at an informal gathering, the secretary of the society asked Saunders why he critiqued the productions of the Auckland Operatic Society so harshly, compared with the more lenient way he judged suburban societies. He replied that he judged the Auckland Operatic Society by professional standards and suburban societies by amateur ones.}\]
After commenting on the many changes that had taken place in set design over the years, Bill Leathwick observed:

Out of all the shows I’ve ever been in, it [technological change] was brought home to me most strongly with My Fair Lady. . . . On the opening night, the curtain rose on the library set, and I said to Ken Porter who played the role of Pickering, “Turn the lights on, Pickering”. I went to say my next line, but the audience gasped and went into rapturous applause. The reason was . . . if I give you a book wrapped in nice paper, you open it and it’s the joy of opening it. It’s the same as a curtain rising, and all is revealed. You don’t see anybody coming on doing things, as you do with modern shows, you don’t hear noises behind the drop scene, or see people getting into position or watch props people running around, changing things round in semi-darkness. The old-fashioned shows had that great advantage.563

Leathwick commented also that microphones were not used for the production, despite the fact that there was a twenty-seven piece orchestra, because performers had been taught to project their voices. In view of the success of the production, the season was extended by five nights. There were some problems, however. The orchestra, which had agreed on a certain price to play for the show, insisted that their fee be trebled for extra performances.564 The matter was resolved after many hours of negotiation, with a higher fee being agreed.

The year of 1978 was one of contrast, both in the choice of musicals and the theatre spaces used, but proved financially sound. Fiddler on the Roof was mounted at His Majesty’s Theatre, which was a traditional proscenium-arch theatre with blacks, legs, house tabs, and a fly tower. Conversely, three workshop productions were staged at the 120-seat Gog, an unusual theatre space.565 Two tunefully familiar British shows, Salad Days and H.M.S. Pinafore, were followed by the Auckland premiere of Sondheim’s concept musical Company. Maggie Wright, who produced Company, remembered the challenges:

We were in a weird and wonderful set of rooms you had to create an atmosphere in. . . . It seemed to work very well with a bit of innovative enterprise and hand props and lighting, which was very important. It was technically difficult, because you couldn’t hang lighting in there, so you had to do the best you could. . . . We had to use our imagination for several of the scenes. So we used different levels and rostra with some rather steep steps that the company had to negotiate at times. . . . One scene in particular, a bedroom scene, was supposed to be a nude scene, but of course we couldn’t in those days portray it in reality so I used a screen and a silhouette situation.566

The acoustics of the Gog, however, were excellent because of the high ceilings and wooden floors. Pillars surrounded the periphery, underneath a rectangular mezzanine floor. The orchestra was normally positioned at stage right, near the rear by the audience, which was seated on chairs behind the pillars. Therefore, it was not a traditional

563 Personal interview with Bill Leathwick, 19 August 2007.
564 Annual report, 19 March 1978.
565 By staging a workshop production the society was able to experiment with new shows such as Company, and give new directors the chance to hone their skills. These three productions were mounted with experienced performers.
566 Personal interview with Maggie Wright, 17 May 2007.
proscenium-arch theatre with a curtain. The large main area of the Gog became the acting space: the small stage, which had been the original pulpit, was of limited use (plate 22).

However, it was not only the theatre space that was challenging. The music proved as much of a challenge to the performers as it was to the audience, with its cynical themes, jagged tunes and complicated rhythms. Initially, one piano and drums were used. However, the music proved so difficult rhythmically that the musical director arranged for a second piano to pound out the rhythm, to assist the singers.567

The Auckland Operatic Society had had to adapt to the times in order to survive, but their situation was not unique. Williamson’s, who had held a copyright monopoly for decades, now faced strong competition from other copyright holders, such as Samuel French, Chappell’s and Tams-Witmark. Unusually, in the Fiddler on the Roof (1978) programme, Williamson’s had inserted a full page advertisement headed, “Free yourself from the tensions of to-day’s modern living”.568 It urged the general public to join an amateur musical society as a performer, technician or musician, or to consider founding a new amateur society. Williamson’s pointed out that they held the amateur rights for many musicals with large choruses: as professional companies could no longer afford to stage musicals with large numbers of people, a good opportunity existed for amateurs. While it is a moot point as to whether amateur companies could, in fact, afford to stage musicals with large casts, Williamson’s comments acknowledged the importance of amateur musical societies.

567 The author played the part of Marta in this production.
Following its recent successes, the society decided to stage two major productions at His Majesty’s Theatre during 1979, to celebrate its sixtieth year. Some committee members expressed concern as to the financial viability of presenting the “old-fashioned” musical, *The Great Waltz.* However, the musical, which was directed by Brian O’Connor, recorded a profit of $5,620, and received the annual J. C. Williamson Trophy for best amateur production in New Zealand. Audiences flocked to the theatre, despite an unremarkable newspaper review (*Auckland Star*, 20 April 1979):

On the opening night of the diamond jubilee production of the Auckland Operatic Society, the Symphonia of Auckland delivered the music with a polish that was not always matched on stage. Part of the problem is the libretto, which is often forced and inadequate. . . . Part of it again was a certain lack of fluidity and verve in the staging from time to time when the full company was on stage, particularly during the first act. This placed an added burden on the principals, and all responded with assured performances. Margaret Denize as Helene Vernet and Brian McKay as Strauss senior shared the singing honours, while Patricia Aldersley (Resi Ebeseder) was a model to all for the way she projected her stage personality across the footlights. . . . The production was set off by an astonishing variety of sets and backdrops and some splendid period costuming.

It is intriguing that Ian Harris, the newspaper critic, considered the standard of chorus work could have been improved. The auditions, in fact, had attracted a large number of performers, who relished the opportunity to sing in a more operatic style. Thus, many singers who had played leading roles for both the Auckland Operatic Society and other societies were accepted into the chorus. The opulent set and costumes, nevertheless, had considerable visual appeal and were applauded by the critics (plate 23).

![Plate 23 The Great Waltz (1979), act I, scene 2, Helene and company “I’m in Love with Vienna”](image)

The society, however, perceived itself as one of the leading theatre groups in Auckland. In the *Great Waltz* programme, the chairman stated: “Though it is amateur in the punitive

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and recreational senses of the word, the society has always aimed to achieve high professional standards in the widest sense of that word”. 570

All the same, the relatively modern musical *Hello Dolly!*, which was mounted a few months later in His Majesty’s Theatre, recorded a loss of $4,158. 571 This was despite the fact that a well known television personality called Paula Keenan played the leading role while several experienced performers played the other principal parts.

**The 1980s**

The new 200-seat Bowen Studio Theatre was opened officially on 19 March 1980. 572 Originally, the theatre had been the classroom block of the old synagogue which was under the heritage trust. Thus, the exterior could not be altered. The Bowen Studio Theatre exemplified the magic of theatre. An objective glance at the exterior of the building revealed a slightly shabby exterior. However, members have very fond memories of a “beautiful little theatre” that was a “magical space”. 573 Essentially, it was a black box theatre with a wooden floor. The stage and first four rows of the audience seating were on the same level, with the remainder of the seats erected on two tiers. The shape of the theatre was neither rectangular nor square but slightly angled (plate 24).

![Plate 24 Bowen Studio Theatre exterior, 1980](image)

This irregular shape led to some challenges with set design. Photographs are not available for the first three productions in the Bowen Studio Theatre in 1980 (*Oh, What a Lonely War; Tap and All That* (a revue); and *A Christmas Carol*). However, a photograph of *Revue-ing the Situation*, a Christmas revue staged at the theatre in November/December 1981, clearly shows the set (plate 25).

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570 *Great Waltz* (1979) programme.
571 Income and expenditure account, 31 December 1980.
573 Ibid.
Hans Christian Andersen (1980), directed by Maggie Wright and staged at His Majesty’s Theatre, featured a popular New Zealand entertainer called Ray Woolf. At the time, Woolf starred in his own light entertainment television programme. Consequently, he had been invited to play the leading role in Hans Christian Andersen in the hope that his presence would attract audiences. However, neither Woolf nor the large number of children in the cast proved a drawcard. The publicity officer had ascertained that the Danish community in Auckland numbered approximately 2,000, but there was less interest than the society had anticipated.

Nevertheless, in 1981 the Auckland Operatic Society re-established its presence by staging Annie, which proved the greatest success of the decade. Annie, which was directed by Brian O’Connor, was presented in conjunction with Michael Edgley International, a company that normally imported professional international shows. Consequently, there was a general perception that Annie was being staged by international professionals, a view the society was happy to reinforce. The set was hired from Hamilton Operatic Society, which had purchased it from a professional company.

Technically, the set was so complicated that a team of forty stagehands and technicians worked for two weeks to install it at His Majesty’s Theatre. There were thirteen scene changes, involving twenty pieces of flying scenery with a weight of about twenty tonnes. Two conveyor belts, or treadmills, moved scenery and props along the front of the stage. The New York City scene reveals a stunning effect (plate 26).

574 Woolf’s fee was not specified in the financial records.
576 Committee minutes, 2 November 1981.
Closed circuit television, which was unusual in this era, was installed backstage to assist with stage management.

The publicity officer, Maggie Wright, was complimented by the committee for conducting a superb marketing campaign that included banners stating “You must see Annie”, stretched high above Queen Street, the main thoroughfare of the central business district in Auckland.\(^578\) Bute Hewes, a well known Auckland theatre critic, declared in his radio review of Annie on 4 October 1981:

> In a lifetime of theatregoing, I can’t recall ever seeing a show as spectacular as this production of Annie or one I admired so much for sheer perfection of stagecraft. There, I can’t put it any more plainly than that, that this show is a knock-out, a smash hit, a winner and all the other superlative clichés showbusiness people love and sometimes deserve. . . . constant applause went to every scene-change – and that’s something you don’t often see. These magnificent sets change every few minutes in full view of the audience and without breaking the flow of action. Brooklyn Bridge slides quietly off, and on comes the Warbucks mansion or the White House complete with Roosevelt and his Cabinet in session . . . the Auckland Operatic Society took the plunge and made it work – brilliantly.

The general public obviously agreed with Hewes’ assessment, as Annie played to full houses for most of the season. The musical recorded a profit of $48,988.

During 1983, the society decided to consolidate its position at the Bowen Studio Theatre and present three productions in its own premises. The subcommittee had improved the studio theatre by adding raised seating, a firm and safe stage extension, tab tracks, a sound system and an airconditioning unit.\(^579\) Several working bees had been organised to carry out the work. Tarantara, Tarantara! (1983) proved a popular choice, which attracted good houses. It was an artistic and financial success.

\(^{578}\) Annual report, 29 March 1982.
However, *Song of Norway*, directed by Robert Alderton and staged at His Majesty’s Theatre, recorded a loss of $18,131. Owing to a sudden wave of nostalgia that was being promoted by media and arts-oriented organisations at the time, the society felt that *Song of Norway* would be successful. Thus, the show had been promoted as “an operetta in the grand tradition”, with new sets and colourful costumes based on the lavish style of production of yesteryear. However, the general public was not interested in nostalgia, as was evidenced by the many empty seats in the theatre. This was in contrast to the successful production of *The Great Waltz* in 1979.

The year of 1984 was one of changing fortunes, but ultimately proved financially successful. It was decided to mount two productions in the Bowen Studio Theatre and one major show at His Majesty’s Theatre. The first production for 1984 was a musical interpretation of the reading of the Tarot Cards, called *Trumps*; the second was *Barely Broadway*, a revue. Both productions were devised by members, with the latter proving more successful than the former.

After the financial debacle with *Song of Norway*, the committee was cautious in its choice of a major musical for 1984. Many options were explored, but ultimately the society decided to once again stage *Annie*. An approach had been made by Hamilton Operatic Society in regard to a return season of *Annie*, on the basis that the Auckland Operatic Society refurbished the sets, properties and costumes, to a cost limit decided by Hamilton. The Auckland Operatic Society would keep the profits. The committee was of the opinion that because there was a new generation of children who had not been old enough to view the first production, a return season of *Annie* could be a viable proposition. Moreover, *Annie* had recently graced movie screens, giving Aucklanders the opportunity to re-acquaint themselves with the musical. Pleasingly, *Annie* recorded a profit, although less than in the 1981 season. The committee thanked all concerned for helping to maintain “the expected high standard of the Society’s productions”.

The first production for 1985 was *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* at the 350-seat Centennial Theatre. Amateur rights had become available in 1984. The chairman, who had seen the show on Broadway in 1981, had been struck by its vitality, colour and

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582 Ibid.
583 Ibid.
584 Ibid.
tuneful music. Auditions in Auckland attracted “the cream of the young, talented, up-and-coming performers that abounded”.585 The musical recorded a profit.

Continuing with the policy of variety, diversity and challenge in the choice of shows, the society decided to offer a musical which would be of interest to its more “classically-inclined” members.586 The Mikado had premiered in London in 1885: thus 1985 was its centenary year. As a tribute to Gilbert and Sullivan, the society decided to mount the musical at His Majesty’s Theatre in spectacular fashion, under the direction of John Fausett.587 It was The Mikado with a difference, staged in the framework of the Japanese Kabuki theatre style, to emphasise the “fascination with things Oriental which greeted the premiere on 14th March, 1885”.588 The Mikado, Kabuki-style, proved a resounding success, both artistically and financially. Audiences and critics alike praised the artistry and staging.

The colourful costumes and imaginative set are displayed to good effect in a photograph of the female chorus (plate 27).

Plate 27 The Mikado (1985), female chorus courtesy John Fausett

The makeup was Kumadori-style, “an elaborate stylised make-up where usually red equals good, blue equals evil”.589 Performers normally applied their own makeup. In this case, however, a professional team supervised and applied the specialty makeup. The colours were striking (plate 28).

585 Annual report, 6 April 1986.
586 Ibid.
587 Ibid.
The set designer, Nicola Tresidder, was a professional who had trained in theatre design at the Central School of Art and Design in London, followed by two years at the Royal Opera House Costume Department.\textsuperscript{590} John Fausett, who had spent many hours researching Kabuki in an effort to produce a quality production, paid tribute to Tresidder:

I’d talk with her in great detail, I’d tell her what I felt, I’d play her the music. I’d give her a list, which would say “There’s seating for four in this room”. I wouldn’t say “There has to be an armchair and two couches”. We’d talk – usually over a wine – about descriptive words, colours, sensations. It all sounds terribly arty, but someone creative like Nicola, that’s how she worked. She would go away and come back with amazing designs I would never have thought of. We used to work brilliantly together, because we each respected the other’s ability.\textsuperscript{591}

Tresidder eventually returned to England, as it was difficult to find work consistently as a professional set designer in New Zealand. \textit{The Mikado} was the last production staged by the society at His Majesty’s, because the theatre was demolished in 1988.

\textit{The Biograph Girl} (1986), a nostalgic tribute to Hollywood’s glorious era of silent movies, staged in the Bowen Theatre, was well-received by the public.\textsuperscript{592} Conversely, \textit{Where’s Charley?} staged at the 400-seat Maidment Theatre in the University of Auckland complex, played to sparsely-filled houses. As the Maidment Theatre was located in Princes Street on the University of Auckland campus, approximately one-half kilometre from the Gog, the committee believed it was an ideal venue. The show was well cast; it featured colourful costumes with interesting and novel sets, tuneful songs and stylish

\textsuperscript{590} The \textit{Mikado} (1985) programme, 4.
\textsuperscript{591} Personal interview with John Fausett, 8 October 2008.
\textsuperscript{592} Annual report, 5 April 1987.
choreography, but the general public did not support it.\footnote{Annual report, 5 April 1987.} The committee was at a loss to explain the lack of patronage.

*Amahl and the Night Visitors* (1986), a one act opera directed by Sherrin Scelly, was the final production staged at the Bowen Theatre. Compared with some of the technologically advanced productions that the society had staged during the past decade, the predominant use of painted backdrops in *Amahl* seemed to reflect a bygone era. The opera was received enthusiastically by members, who were aware that it was a significant moment in the history of the society: the finale for the Bowen and the Gog. The Christmas party, which, in effect, was also a farewell for the “beloved Bowen”, was held at the Gog on 6 December 1986.\footnote{Ibid.} The chairman’s statement reflected the feelings of members:

> So it’s goodbye to our home of seventeen years – a home that took an enormous amount of hard work by a great many people to turn into a rehearsal and theatre complex: a complex that has seen some wonderful shows performed, some marvellous parties celebrated and some great times had by all. Everyone will have their own special memories of “The Gog” but the Society cannot exist on memories alone and we must move forward into what I believe is going to be a more exciting and challenging chapter in our long history.\footnote{Ibid.}

The society was now officially homeless. However, because “the show must go on”, loyal members scoured Auckland to find suitable performance venues. It was difficult to find a venue for rehearsals, set-building facilities and a theatre for the pending production of *Jack the Ripper* (1987).\footnote{Annual report, 5 May 1988.} Ultimately, rehearsals were held at Seddon High School, Western Springs. Ironically, council offered the society the Bowen Avenue complex in which to build the set. Neither *Jack the Ripper*, which was staged at the Customhouse Theatre in the city, nor *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1988), staged at the Centennial Theatre, made a profit.\footnote{Annual report, 9 May 1989.} On the other hand, *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat*, staged in the Symphonia Theatre in Dominion Road, Mt Eden, in the inner western suburbs, was financially successful.

Hundreds of performers flocked to the auditions for *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1989), which was being produced to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the society.\footnote{Annual report, 6 May 1990.} Fifty performers were chosen in a high-calibre cast. Rehearsals were held in an Epsom church hall, and the musical was staged at the Auckland Girls’ Grammar School Memorial Theatre. Several new members assisted with costumes and in a backstage capacity, a heartening sign for the homeless society. *Jesus Christ Superstar* made a healthy profit. However, a letter was received from Mrs Ross of the Auckland Jewish Council,
complaining that certain aspects of the show were anti-Semitic: the display of the Jewish Flag, the crucifix, and the rabbis portrayed as “the baddies”.\(^599\) In a lengthy conversation, Maggie Wright, the chairman, managed to convince Mrs Ross that the society was not anti-Semitic. Thus, the matter was resolved amicably.

The 1990s

*Little Shop of Horrors* (1990), which was partly sponsored by radio Classic Hits 97FM and staged at the Centennial Theatre, made a small profit. However, *Oliver!*, mounted in the Memorial Theatre, recorded a huge loss of $16,124.10. In assessing the reasons for the loss, the committee admitted that too high a proportion of the budget for the show had been spent on royalties to Tams-Witmark, the copyright holder. It is surprising that the committee was not aware before staging the show that the cost of royalties could be a problem. The society was forced to borrow money from the trust in order to pay its debts.

Both the 1991 musicals, *Chicago* staged at Centennial Theatre and *Hair* at St James Theatre, proved sound choices. *Chicago* starred Lisa Chappell as Velma. At the time, Chappell was a well known Auckland television performer in *Gloss*, a local “soap opera”. She also co-hosted a breakfast show on radio 2X5 FM. Chappell eventually moved to Australia, where she starred in the television drama, *MacLeod’s Daughters*.

*Hair*, directed by Chris Baldock, caught the imagination of the general public and played to full houses. It had no stars, but made a profit of $28,873. Julia Leathwick, a performer on both stage and television, worked as production manager for *Hair*. She recalled:

> The show was a huge success for various reasons. It hadn’t been done for twenty years, and we got wonderful publicity. Patricia Bartlett, who was the Christian values person, campaigned against it, and we ended up with a twenty-minute slot on the Paul Holmes Show [on television]. It’s very unusual for an amateur show to get a slot like that, so that was publicity you couldn’t buy. We had a slide projector, which was very innovative in those days, doing a countdown from 1991 back to 1969 with a band underplaying and using images of the time.\(^600\)

In fact, the nudity and coarse language proved a magnet for younger audiences, but several complaints were received from the general public in regard to the vulgarity of the musical. Conversely, *Guys and Dolls* (1992), a tuneful musical with no risque scenes, which was staged in the Centennial Theatre, made a loss of $2,969. However, thanks to the success of the musicals in 1991, the society was in a healthy financial situation. It was homeless, but not penniless.

\(^599\) Annual report, 6 May 1990.
\(^600\) Personal interview with Julia Leathwick, 11 July 2007.
Conclusion

This era proved one of the most challenging in the history of the society. After moving to the Gog in the expectation of remaining there permanently, by 1987 the society was forced to surrender its lease because of financial difficulties. Both audience and membership numbers declined, owing to the urban sprawl and the resulting exodus of many people to the outlying suburbs. Moreover, there was increasing competition from the professional Mercury Theatre and visiting overseas theatrical troupes, as well as a second television channel.

In 1971, a touring troupe was established under the name Auckland Music Theatre Company, to produce out-of-town productions, as the society was not in a financial position to mount shows in Auckland. Social committees were established, in an effort to organise functions to raise funds. Many working bees were held to move scenery and properties, and to maintain the premises. The society appointed a business manager to oversee its overall financial strategy, and a show manager to deal with the day-to-day problems when shows were in rehearsal and on stage. In 1989, the society commissioned the Alphergy Consulting Group to conduct a feasibility study in an effort to improve its working framework, but the study did not reveal any new information.

The committee chose the repertoire carefully, in a bid to ensure that the society remained solvent. A variety of musicals, not necessarily similar in style, proved successful. For instance, *The Great Waltz* (1979), a relatively old-fashioned musical with operatic-style singing proved an outstanding success, as did *Annie* (1981) a modern musical. Several professional performers, some of whom were paid a fee, performed in the various musicals over the years, but their presence did not guarantee the success of a show.

The society established the Auckland Arts Centre at 19 and 21 Princes Street. Initially, the hiring out of facilities, sets, costumes and properties proved profitable, but this source of income declined over the years. The Bowen Studio Theatre, which was opened in 1980, was steadily upgraded as money became available. However, the lease was surrendered in 1987, and the theatre was closed. A site had been acquired at Meola Road, Western Springs, but owing to problems with resource consent from Auckland City Council it was not until 1993 that the new complex was finally completed. In the meantime, the society was homeless for a period of six years, staging its shows and finding rehearsal venues on a show-by-show basis. On the positive side, several grants were received from several sources. Moreover, loyal members provided volunteer labour and moral support to ensure the survival of the society.
CHAPTER NINE

Redefining Theatrical Traditions:
Auckland Music Theatre Inc. 1993 to 2009

The Tin Shed

Auckland Music Theatre commenced a new way of life in the inner western suburbs in 1993, in a traffic-congested city far removed from the tram-linked town of 1919 Auckland. For the first time in seven years, all production and technical facilities were located under one roof. Volunteers, including a repairs and maintenance team, continued to work in the evenings and at the weekend.

At the 1993 annual general meeting, a motion was passed to change the name from the Auckland Operatic Society to Auckland Music Theatre.\(^{601}\) Members believed that the new name conveyed a contemporary image. The lease for the premises was signed on 27 July 1993. In compliance with the law, on 1 October 1993 a certified copy was issued.\(^{602}\) The society assumed responsibility for the daily operations of the Westpoint complex from the Auckland Musical Arts Trust, which retained ownership of the buildings and assets.\(^{603}\)

This chapter will describe how the society adapted to life in the suburbs by not only acquiring a new theatre audience, but also producing a repertoire that was conducive to a 122-seat black box theatre. Furthermore, it will examine the procedures and policies adopted to ensure compliance with the escalating legal requirements; the increased use of information and communications technology; new avenues for sponsorship and hireage; and the increasing competition from suburban societies and schools.

Adapting to the Life and Times of Musical Theatre in Suburbia

As membership numbers had declined, the society was left with only a handful of loyal helpers, many of whom were not in the first blush of youth.\(^{604}\) Younger members participated in productions, but tended to audition for various societies rather than remaining loyal to only one. Moreover, as many people were employed in fulltime jobs on

\(^{601}\) Annual general meeting minutes, 18 April 1993.
\(^{603}\) Ibid. The cost of upkeep for Westpoint was $10,000 annually.
\(^{604}\) Committee minutes, 1 March 1993.
a seven-day turnaround instead of the five-day week of yesteryear, there was less time to devote to recreation. This was a common problem for many leisure groups.

The committee had been reorganised many times over the lifetime of the society. However, from 1993 to 2009, restructuring the committee and revamping policies was a continuing process. Aspiring directors were required to submit written applications if they wished to direct a particular show. They were then interviewed by a special committee which decided on the appointee. Thus, the process was now more rigorous compared with previous decades, when directors had often been invited to direct a show.

Shows in the suburbs were no longer reviewed by newspapers, much to the dismay of musical societies: not only had there been a certain amount of kudos associated with a review but also, in essence, it provided free advertising. Nevertheless, from 2001, NAPTA entered the arena and offered a range of awards for participation in amateur theatre. This gave performers and crew, alike, a goal for which to strive.

Statutory requirements increased from the 1990s, particularly in regard to the receipt of grants and other benefits. To retain its status as a charitable institution and thus exempt from paying tax, the society was required by the Internal Revenue Department to ensure there was no private financial gain for members. Thus, rule 4 was amended to read: “nothing expressed or implied herein shall permit the activities of the society to be carried on for the private pecuniary advantage of any member”.  

In 1998, Westpoint was valued officially at $1.3 million, a substantial sum. The trust was concerned, however, that a “proper management structure” in terms of basic systems and accounting methods had not been set up. Fears were expressed that unless the situation was controlled very quickly, the society was in grave danger of losing the legacy left by its predecessors. Thus, new systems were implemented to provide more accountability, and the hireage of both the complex and the equipment was formalised.

The Business Side of Showbusiness

The minutes for this era focus increasingly on business aspects. Consequently, if the “name of the game” is “showbusiness”, one could say that as the decades progressed, the emphasis leaned towards “business”. As the use of microphones by performers and orchestras became standard practice by the 1990s, sound equipment developed into a considerable expense. However, good-quality sound was necessary, as the society was
competing with overseas entertainment troupes. Therefore, expenditure in other areas, such as programmes, was reduced. In previous decades, programmes were characterised by highly-crafted artwork and photographs of performers and crew, as well as a foreword from the chairman. Moreover, decorative advertisements from sponsors were often features in themselves. As the 1990s progressed, programmes became less elaborate, although there were exceptions for some shows with larger casts. Generally, however, programmes were reduced to a double-sided A4 sheet of glossy paper or cardboard, sometimes folded in half. That is not to say that the programmes were unattractive, but certainly they were less imposing.

During the 1990s the hireage of Westpoint provided a good source of income, because the complex was in demand as a rehearsal venue for theatrical groups, schools, dance companies and professional enterprises. For instance, the complex was leased to Opera New Zealand for rehearsals of Madame Butterfly in 1994. As the set was built in the technical space, income from that hireage was substantial. The Pasifika (Polynesian) Arts Festival and Christmas in the Park hired Westpoint annually for some years for rehearsals, as did Mount Albert Grammar School. In addition, there were a number of single-day hireages. The society owned also the largest stock of properties and costumes for hire in Auckland. Volunteers, including Judith Mitchener and John Fausett, organised the stock and hireage. One of the more unusual hireages in 1994 was the hiring of costumes for Oliver! to the International School in Beijing, China. However, to raise funds, costumes and properties for which there was no further use were sold at garage sales, on Trade Me and through Dunbar Sloan Auctioneers. Volunteers organised the sales.

Financing a production continued to be problematic. Owing to the continual parade of Queen Street professional shows, an ever-increasing choice of one-off theatrical events, exhibitions, concerts and activities, which were all aimed at the discretionary dollar, Auckland Music Theatre struggled to retain its audience base. Acquiring funding, too, was becoming more difficult. Although the society had received some grants during the year, the 1996 annual report expressed concern at the general unavailability of funding for amateur musical societies. As an example, the chairman quoted a recent newspaper article, which had reported that with the opening of the SkyCity Casino the patronage of the slot

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609 Younger theatregoers who have grown up in an era of highly-amplified rock concerts expect high decibel levels, regardless of the size of the venue.
610 Committee minutes, 1 August 1994.
611 As listed in various annual reports, groups that hired Westpoint included Stetson Productions, a professional company which imported overseas theatrical productions; the Michael Hurst Group of professional entertainers; and the Ugly Shakespeare Company.
machines in local pubs had dropped considerably.\textsuperscript{612} In previous years all proceeds from the pub machines had been directed back to the community, but this would no longer be the case. Auckland Music Theatre had been advised that organisations such as the rescue helicopter and the St John Ambulance Association now received priority.

Funds that specifically targeted the performing arts were available from Creative New Zealand, but those grants were directed towards professionals. The chairman believed it was time that amateur operatic societies were acknowledged for the huge, unrewarded role they played in training performers and backstage crew. She considered that Auckland Music Theatre had established and achieved standards of professionalism that surpassed those of companies which claimed to be the theatre professionals.\textsuperscript{613} There is another point: amateur theatre in Auckland has a long history of continuous operation, unlike professional theatre or opera.\textsuperscript{614}

**The Consortium**

Auckland Music Theatre did consider staging a megamusical in 1993, as part of a consortium with nine other amateur societies throughout New Zealand. The secretary attended a meeting in Wellington on 25 February 1993, organised by Musical Theatre New Zealand.\textsuperscript{615} It was agreed by the ten societies, which were interested in joining the consortium that costs would be shared equally: money would be placed in a common fund for the manufacture of the set, properties and costumes which would be used by all the societies. A schedule was drawn up with performance dates to stage the chosen megamusical, which would be mounted in various cities under the auspices of a local society. *Les Misérables* was the chosen production, and was first staged by the Wellington Operatic Society in 1994.

Initially, Auckland Music Theatre agreed to participate, and bookings were pencilled in at the St James Theatre.\textsuperscript{616} It had been estimated that the cost of staging *Les Misérables* would be in the vicinity of $353,186. A deposit of $35,000 each was required

\textsuperscript{612} Annual report, 24 March 1996. During 1995, several grants were received: the Lotteries Grants Board, $28,000; Auckland Savings Bank Community Trust, $40,000; Auckland City, $5,000 for replacement and upgrade of electrical equipment; Chenery Memorial Trust, $1,000 towards the cost of signage; and Auckland Musical Arts Trust, $16,950. Subsequently, obtaining funds from outside sources became more difficult.

\textsuperscript{613} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{614} Nicholas Tarling’s incisive account of the intermittent history of opera in New Zealand provides an interesting juxtaposition to the history of amateur musical theatre. Indeed, his opening paragraph, “Opera has a long history in Auckland, but not much continuity”, sums up the situation. As cited in Tarling, *On and Off*.

\textsuperscript{615} Committee minutes, 1 March 1993.

\textsuperscript{616} Committee minutes, 5 April 1993.
from the ten societies involved. However, as Auckland Music Theatre suffered heavy losses on its 1993 productions, it withdrew from the consortium. Not all members supported the decision, but in view of its straitened financial circumstances, the society had little choice. The consortium continues to the present with various societies becoming involved as their finances permit, but Auckland Music Theatre has not participated. (North Shore Music Theatre replaced Auckland Music Theatre in the consortium.)

The Spectre of Insolvency

In late 1993 the society was insolvent: official bankruptcy proceedings would have been instigated had it not been for the trust. The combined financial losses of *Fiddler on the Roof* and *The Wizard of Oz*, totalling $121,662, were the heaviest in the history of the society. This was ironic: the society had spent much of the past six years struggling for survival in makeshift premises and, now, when it had finally found a resting place at Westpoint, the biggest financial crisis in its history loomed. At a special meeting on 18 November 1993, the society formally requested a loan of $16,000 from the trust. An interest-free loan, to be repaid within two years, was agreed. In referring to this episode, Ian Gardiner, chairman of the Auckland Musical Arts Trust in 2009, explained:

> There is an unwritten rule in the trust that we keep a certain amount of money aside, so basically if the society went belly up, we could still resurrect it by doing a show. With the other moneys the trust gets, it purchases equipment for the society. How it works: generally, the society comes along and asks the trust if the society can buy some equipment. Where we can, the trust tries to get a grant from various charitable community trusts, either one hundred per cent funding or a percentage. There are no fixed places where we can get money. We can’t get any funding to do a show but can get funding for equipment.

Not for the first time, the importance of the trust as guardian of the assets of the society and the foresight of those who had established it in 1966 became apparent.

Rival Suburban Societies in the 1990s

In contrast with Auckland Music Theatre, which was struggling to gain a foothold in its new location, several suburban societies were well-established by the 1990s. A number of societies had built or purchased their own theatres: Centrestage, the Glen Eden Playhouse, Harlequin Musical Theatre, Manukau Performing Arts, Papakura Theatre Company and Pukekohe Light Opera Club. In some cases, the theatres were superior to that of Auckland Music Theatre not only in terms of a greater number of seats, but also in

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617 Minutes of special meeting, 30 August 1993.
618 Auckland Musical Arts Trust minutes, 18 November 1993.
620 Some societies had reached an agreement with their local councils; they either shared maintenance expenses of the premises or were partially subsidised by council.
appearance. The repertoire and length of season offered by all the societies, too, was similar. In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, suburban societies tended to stage seasons of a few nights, normally Wednesday to Saturday in two consecutive weeks. However, from the 1980s, a two-week season from Tuesday to Sunday including at least one matinee during the weekend was not unusual.

Moreover, some societies were expanding their membership base by establishing a youth theatre similar to that set up by Centrestage in 1980, as noted in chapter eight. For instance, in 1994 Pukekohe Light Opera Club, the southernmost society in the Auckland region, formed a youth theatre for children aged from ten to fourteen years. The founder was Mary Gray, a longstanding member of the club who had realised that there was a need for theatrical training for young people when 100 children auditioned for twelve roles in *The Sound of Music* in 1992. Over the years, workshops in lighting, sound, makeup and characterisation have been implemented. Students are encouraged to write, direct and perform in their own plays as well as participating in the mainstream musicals. The youth group continues into 2009 and beyond. As Gray stated:

Pukekohe Light Opera Club has never been so strong in its membership. This is because over the years we have attracted many parents of our Youth Theatre members, who, seeing the fun their children are having, have decided to have ‘a go’ themselves. With each new Youth Theatre show we attract new members, and Youth Theatre shows are popular with our audiences as can be seen by the high audience attendance.

Fundraising through sponsorship, subscriptions and sausage sizzles is undertaken regularly. Gray paid tribute to the work of volunteers.

**Amateur Theatre but Professional Standards**

Auckland Music Theatre had not ventured into youth theatre, unlike Pukekohe Light Opera Club and Centrestage, but did have a long history of training performers and technical crews, as noted in previous chapters. Indeed, the importance of professionalism in all activities is a continuing theme in the minutes. Nevertheless, there were difficulties in regard to cast members who were professional/amateurs. That is, they performed in amateur productions without receiving pay, but also undertook paid professional work in the entertainment industry. Those performers now employed an agent who took a

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621 Personal communication from Mary Gray, 5 March 2008. Gray was president of the society at the time, and had been a member since 1981.

622 Ibid. Gray observed that feedback was very positive. Parents commented that as a result of participation in theatre the children were “on top of things” emotionally, that schoolwork had vastly improved and that there had been positive changes in attitude and behaviour. The children also had the opportunity to make friends, develop writing skills and improve self-esteem.
percentage of their takings. To overcome legal wrangles, the Playhouse Theatre in west Auckland had introduced a special contract that made it clear that their society was an amateur one which did not pay performers. This amateur/professional crossover was not a new occurrence: since the establishment of theatre in Auckland, professionals had contributed to amateur theatre, as noted. However, with the introduction of theatrical agents, Actors’ Equity and various law changes, the situation had become more complicated.

At the 1999 annual general meeting, the chairman, Sue Skinner, reiterated that amateur societies were the training ground for the theatre industry in Auckland. She stated that she had come into theatre from television, where it was “every man for himself, spend all the money and don’t get caught if you stuff up”. Skinner admitted that it was a significant change to join the theatre industry, which was based on teamwork backed by centuries of tradition. She considered that in the contemporary environment, this legacy was one of the strengths of the industry, and made theatre people “so different”. In recent years, Skinner had worked in a technical capacity with Opera New Zealand in Auckland. She realised that all of the backstage crew had been trained either by Auckland Music Theatre or other amateur societies, because the professional opera company did not have the resources. Skinner paid tribute to the many performing and technical training workshops that had been conducted over the years by Auckland Music Theatre.

The Changing of the Guard and the New Millennium

As the new millennium approached, there were many changes. Sanda Sewell, the longest-serving secretary in the history of the society, resigned in 2000 after thirty-three years. It proved difficult to find a dedicated replacement. Maggie Wright, who had joined the committee in 1968, resigned in 2003. Wright’s contribution as performer, director and committee member had spanned thirty-five years. Indeed, she claimed that the society had been her “life” over this period.

Demand for the hireage of Westpoint began to wane. Membership declined, as did volunteer labour. Attempts were made to recruit new technical people and students from

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623 Annual general minutes, 28 April 1996.
624 In the audition notices that appear on the websites of societies nowadays, a clause is normally inserted which states that performers will not be paid.
625 Annual report, 12 April 1999.
626 Ibid.
627 Ibid.
628 Sewell was appointed a trustee of the Auckland Musical Arts Trust in 2000. She had joined the society in 1964 and became secretary in 1967.
629 Personal interview with Maggie Wright, 17 May 2007.
local schools and various youth organisations, but without success. Schools, of course, were now regularly performing their own productions. Another problem was finding musicians who were available to play in the orchestra for seasons of up to three weeks, particularly as the society paid a lesser hourly rate than professional organisations. In addition, there were many other leisure activities on offer. Sport was an all-pervading influence, with night fixtures now a popular source of entertainment.  This competed with traditional theatrical activities. As Maggie Wright pointed out, from the late 1990s it was not unusual for approximately ten per cent of the cast to withdraw from a show before it was staged, because of “work and other commitments”.  

In order to acquire new ideas for increasing revenue, the committee invited Terry O’Connor, a successful businessman, patron of the arts, and founder of NAPTA, to a meeting on 23 November 2003. O’Connor suggested that the society should hire a professional funding administrator, Diane Vicelich, to assist with budgeting and sponsorship. Vicelich was employed almost immediately after signing a contract which was vetted by the lawyer of the society. Although she did not have a theatre background, Vicelich proved extremely effective. During her twelve-month tenure, she raised $77,000, which included an Auckland Savings Bank grant of $24,500 for new lighting equipment.

During 2003, the society decided to implement a new type of marketing in the form of cinema advertising. Therefore, the funding administrator obtained a grant of $20,000 to advertise in the Rialto and Bridgeway theatres, over a period of twelve months during 2003 and 2004. There were thirty-five advertisements per week, promoting both the hireage of Westpoint and current musical productions. Despite the extensive marketing campaign, neither hireage output nor show bookings improved. Thus, the cinema contract was not renewed. However, special deals for block bookings for Westpoint shows were offered to all retirement villages and rest homes.

Eventually, the society decided that the simplest way to boost income was to extend the theatre to cater for bigger audience numbers. Consequently, members of the committee met with the trust to suggest that another two rows be added in the theatre, to make 150

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630 Personal interview with Ian Gardiner, 19 January 2008. Sport has always been an extremely important activity in New Zealand, more especially as there is the possibility of going into well-paid professional careers.

631 Personal interview with Maggie Wright, 17 May 2007.

632 Ibid. Terry O’Connor, a partner in Amici Productions, which is a munificent sponsor of the performing arts, was eventually invited to become president and then patron of the society. He proved a generous benefactor, by financing the purchase of sixteen new state-of-the-art music stands.

instead of 122 seats. The foyer would be extended along the front of the building in an L-shape, while a new two-storey building would replace the original pink shed. Costumes could then be moved into the upper storey to allow for airing. Properties would be stored in the lower half of the building. Owing to the high cost, the project did not proceed.

**Rival Societies and Schools in the New Millennium**

In south Auckland, the Pukekohe Light Opera Club was invited to assist with an innovative new drama project for a group of “marginalised people” during 2002. The society was approached by the Intellectually Handicapped Children’s (IHC) Manukau Counties Branch Committee, to provide drama classes for the IDEA Drama Group. This enterprise consisted of thirty intellectually handicapped actors, who were keen to mount plays and musicals. The group aimed to write and present original shows every twelve to fifteen months. Their first show, *Excerpts of the Sound of Music*, was of twenty minutes’ duration. With the assistance of the Pukekohe Light Opera Club, which conducted drama workshops at the IHC premises, the IDEA group spent ten months writing and choreographing the musical. As Joan Thomson, a longstanding member of the Pukekohe Light Opera Club, explained:

> There were 23 people in the cast and their very first performance was in their lunch room [at the IHC centre]. Costumes were made from old sheets and various pieces found around the work centre. A beautiful backdrop was painted with assistance from a staff member. The show opened an opportunity for the members to show expression through music, movement and emotion. It gave the members a goal and a chance to show their talents. . . . We operate on a shoestring budget.

In 2003 the IDEA group presented their second production, *Sylvanian Grease*, with the guidance of TC systems, a production company which had had vast experience with mixed ability actors. This time the musical was staged at Harrington Hall, the theatre owned by the Pukekohe Light Opera Club. Stage lighting, makeup and stagecraft tuition was provided by the club. Generally, the IDEA productions focus on marginalised people. They deal with a range of issues such as loneliness, homelessness and the differences between the rich and the poor. Joan Thomson described the 2007 production:

> *Enflamed* told the story of a group of marginalised people who just want more out of life: fame, the perfect partner and money. They want it all and they want it now so they sell their soul to the devil.

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634 Annual report, 29 March 2004. A Save Our Seats (SOS) campaign was ongoing. Twenty seats at $250 each had been purchased by volunteers, many of whom preferred to remain anonymous.

635 Personal communication from Joan Thomson, 4 March 2008.

636 Ibid. Some goals for the IDEA group included to grow in self-esteem, have fun, work as a team, overcome the social stigmas attached to people with a disability, and achieve integration with the Pukekohe theatre community. As more people became involved, a greater range of resources was available: in 2004, for instance, an award-winning costume designer (unnamed) offered her services to the group.

637 Ibid.
who gives them all they want, taking their soul and individuality in return. They studied the difference between good and evil and explored what will happen if one was eliminated. \textsuperscript{638}

The IDEA group continues to operate into 2009 and beyond. It has now been divided into two groups, because of the large numbers involved. Thus, the Pukekohe Light Opera Club has contributed to a worthwhile community project.

It is useful, nevertheless, to have a benefactor, as pointed out by Janice Mackay, an experienced performer and principal of a primary school. Mackay’s mother, Catherine (Kay) Mackay established the Papakura Drama Club, now Papakura Theatre Company, in 1956. Janice Mackay, who has worked with several societies including the Pukekohe Light Opera Club, commented:

I can talk from both the Papakura and Pukekohe perspective. Pukekohe are very lucky because they have a gentleman called Jim Denly who has poured thousands of dollars into that club – he’s not rich, just has saved hard all his life. He has kept the club afloat. He’s a single gentleman in his eighties and still performs. He’s an amazing guy, one of the stalwarts. \textsuperscript{639}

The Pukekohe Light Opera Club do have a section of the wall in the foyer of the theatre dedicated to Jim Denly, featuring a wooden plaque engraved with his name.

However, not all suburban societies were experiencing continuing success. Janice Mackay commented on the effects of changing demographics, especially as it affected her “home” society, the Papakura Theatre Company [21 km north of Pukekohe Light Opera Club]. \textsuperscript{640} Mackay pointed out that many families, all with a European heritage, had supported the Papakura Theatre Company since its inception in 1954. However, they had now moved to other areas of Auckland. In turn, a large number of Indian, Asian and Polynesian families had migrated to the Papakura area. As those ethnic groups have their own strong musical cultures, they do not support the Papakura Theatre Company. Indeed, by 2005 the Papakura Theatre Company experienced difficulties in meeting mortgage commitments. Consequently, their 100-seat Off Broadway Theatre, named as a tribute to Broadway, was sold to the local Community Arts Council. As two members of the Papakura Theatre Company were Arts Councillors, they negotiated a deal whereby the group is permitted not only to use the theatre free of charge but also to hire it out. \textsuperscript{641}

Amateur societies were also experiencing competition from schools in the new millennium. Many high schools had produced one musical annually for decades. Nonetheless, the introduction of the performing arts into the official school curriculum encouraged schools to present a more adventurous repertoire, with a higher standard.

\textsuperscript{638} Personal communication from Joan Thomson, 4 March 2008.
\textsuperscript{639} Personal interview with Janice Mackay, 25 August 2007.
\textsuperscript{640} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{641} Ibid.
When amateur rights became available, schools such as Rangitoto College on the North Shore of Auckland staged *Les Misérables* (2002), using the same version as amateur societies. Schools, of course, do have the advantage of a large, ready-made audience in the form of fellow students, families, friends, ex-students and staff. Rangitoto College, for example, comprised more than 3,000 students and 250 staff in 2002. Productions can involve up to 150 people, including onstage, backstage and front-of-house participants. Musicals are staged in the 1,500-seat school auditorium. The productions staged by suburban societies and schools highlight the fact that Auckland Music Theatre no longer has the high profile of its early days prior to World War II, when it was the only amateur operatic society in Auckland.

**Boosting Technology and Tackling Legal Requirements**

Although Auckland Music Theatre had endeavoured to keep up to date with technological advances, it was decided to implement new strategies to attract young people. The use of iTicket for show bookings was instigated and proved a success, as did online booking. In 2006, Simon Julius, a young committee member who had been responsible for setting up and maintaining the website of the society, suggested that it would be advantageous to use a Google search facility for website “hits”. This would direct people to the website of the society when they searched for certain words such as “theatre” or “musical”. The committee agreed that a trial would be conducted for two months and, depending on the results, a decision would be made as to the feasibility of the scheme. There was a small fee for the service.

Moreover, the use of iPods and podcasts to encourage younger people to attend theatre was implemented. In addition, the society expanded its sphere of influence through social media by establishing its own Facebook site. Members, too, communicated with each other through their own Facebook sites, providing general information and reviews of shows. Indeed, the informal reviews generally were flattering, unlike many of the yesteryear ones by theatre critics. The disadvantage is, however, that the review process

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642 As producer for the Rangitoto College production, the author was responsible for finding sponsorship and drawing up the budget. *Les Misérables* (2002) ran for five performances, one more than was usual for school productions. Ingoings matched outgoings at $29,000. The set was built at the school, but there was no revolve; costumes and wigs were hired from North Shore Music Theatre; the school stage lighting crew was augmented by a professional company; and sound was organised by an ex-student of the school who was a professional sound engineer. A professional, John Fausett, was hired to direct the musical, while the musical director and chorus master were music teachers at the school. The orchestra consisted of music teachers from various parts of Auckland.

643 Committee minutes, 3 May 2004. Until that time, various committee members were responsible for taking bookings either at the theatre or at their homes.

644 Committee minutes, 12 July 2006.
does become rather self-congratulatory. That is not to say that professional critics are necessarily objective.

It was the perception of both the committee and the trust that each was doing its utmost to ensure the survival of the society, but there were tensions between the two bodies. Ideally, the trust as guardian of the assets, and the society as presenter of quality theatrical productions, should have worked together in perfect harmony. However, the committee believed that the trust was too inflexible in releasing funds or making changes. The trust, on the other hand, considered that the committee did not consult sufficiently before it committed itself to major financial outlay. Accordingly, the trust met with the chairman of the society to request that the committee provide “two to three written quotes” when requesting any chattel purchases. Future purchases could be made only with the written permission of the trust. The committee requested that the name of the building be changed to “Auckland Music Theatre”, instead of “Westpoint”, to give a clearer sense of identity. However, the trust pointed out that a name change needed approval at an annual general meeting. In the interests of improving the working relationship, a letter was written to the trust inviting one member to attend regularly the committee meetings of the society.

The bar, which was a good source of revenue for the society, required expensive upgrading to comply with the new liquor licensing regulations to be introduced in 2007. As Garth Clark stated, “Sometimes it’s the bar takings that make the difference between a profit and a loss on a show”. All persons servicing the bar were required to undergo a bar manager’s certificate course; from 2007, this was even more stringently enforced by Auckland City Council. New licensing regulations created problems when Westpoint was hired to outside organisations. While the hiree could use its own staff and equipment for catering, the society was responsible for providing the bar manager, as a compliance certificate was required. The society collected the profits from the bar and provided the bar manager and licence, but the hiree paid the bar manager and technical people.

Hiring out Westpoint had become more difficult under the increasingly demanding Occupational Health and Safety regulations. There were severe penalties for non-compliance. Consequently, the committee was scrupulous in its attention to the legal

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645 Committee minutes, 5 March 2007.
646 Ibid.
647 Ibid.
648 Ibid.
649 Committee minutes, 12 June 2006.
650 Personal interview with Garth Clark, 26 April 2007.
651 Committee minutes, 1 May 2006.
implications. The hire agreement for outside organisations was re-written to include a clause that stated it was incumbent on hirees to comply with all the laws in accordance with the Building Act.\textsuperscript{652} The agreement was vetted by the insurers of the society.

DAS Training Solutions, owned by Simon Julius, donated \$1,000 to update the backstage and front-of-house monitoring equipment.\textsuperscript{653} Moreover, a system was set up whereby production managers for each show reported to the vice-chairman, who chaired monthly meetings. Tighter controls were put in place for the issuing of access cards to outsiders who hired Westpoint.\textsuperscript{654}

In 2009 the committee was renamed the “AMT Theatre Management Team”, to provide a more businesslike image.\textsuperscript{655} Much of the communication was now conducted through electronic media rather than face-to-face meetings.\textsuperscript{656} Thus, the number of committee members was reduced to five, compared with sixteen in the heyday of the society: ad hoc subcommittees were set up as required, on a show-by-show basis. This appeared to work satisfactorily, as it was proving increasingly difficult to find members, particularly younger ones, who were prepared to serve on the committee. The team instigated regular business development meetings. One of its first tasks was to identify a plan to control operating expenses. The paramount consideration was to ensure that Auckland Music Theatre would be marking its one-hundredth anniversary in 2019.\textsuperscript{657}

The Ninetieth Jubilee Milestone

As the society approached its ninetieth jubilee in 2009, many ideas for a grand celebration were mooted: a major show in a city theatre supported by an extravagant marketing campaign, an afternoon tea party for older members, a dinner for all comers and a disco for younger members. However, it became apparent that the only persons who were interested in the history of Auckland Music Theatre were the generations who had contributed to it, mainly older members. Therefore, the society organised an afternoon function on Saturday, 22 August 2009. Costumes, props and programmes were arranged artistically around the theatre, with a digital exhibition of photographs of musicals performed over the decades. A forty-minute potted history of the society from 1919 to 1969, was presented in powerpoint form by Julie Jackson-Tretchikoff, a longstanding

\textsuperscript{652} Committee minutes, 19 May 2007.
\textsuperscript{653} Committee minutes, 11 June 2007.
\textsuperscript{654} Annual report, 29 March 2010.
\textsuperscript{655} Ibid. The minutes show that in each era the committee considered that it was working in a more businesslike manner than had been the case previously.
\textsuperscript{656} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{657} Annual report, 29 March 2010.
member. It was received enthusiastically. The chairman, Pauline Vella, paid tribute to those members who, through their guardianship of Auckland Music Theatre over the years, had “endowed the new generation with a vibrant theatrical legacy”.

The Repertoire 1993 to 2009

Thirty-six musicals were staged in the period from 1993 to 2009 (table 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Composer and Lyricist or Playwright</th>
<th>National Origin</th>
<th>World Premiere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Fiddler on the Roof</td>
<td>Bock/Harnick</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>The Wizard of Oz</td>
<td>Arlen/Harbury/Stothart</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>The Seven Ages of Man (revue)</td>
<td>Devised by Brian O’Connor</td>
<td>UK/USA</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Godspell</td>
<td>Schwartz</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Love off the Shelf</td>
<td>Norman/Grant/Roger Hall</td>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Irma La Douce</td>
<td>Monnot/Brefort</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Bless ‘em All (revue)</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>The Canterbury Tales</td>
<td>Hill/Hawkins/Coghill</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Making it Big</td>
<td>Norman/Roger Hall</td>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>The Pirates of Penzance</td>
<td>Sullivan/Gilbert</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>A Slice of Saturday Night</td>
<td>Heather Brothers</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Evita</td>
<td>Webber/Rice</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum</td>
<td>Sondheim</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>The Music Hall</td>
<td>Devised by Ted Bryant</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Into the Woods</td>
<td>Sondheim</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Red, Hot and Cole</td>
<td>Cole</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>C’est Magnifique: A French Revue</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>UK/USA</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Kiss Me Kate</td>
<td>Porter</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Love Bites: A Concert of Broadway Love Songs</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Follies</td>
<td>Sondheim</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Victor Victoria</td>
<td>Mancini/Wildhorn/Bricusse</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Ladies Night (play)</td>
<td>Sinclair/McCarten</td>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Try to Remember (revue)</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>UK/USA</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat</td>
<td>Webber/Rice</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>70, Girls, 70</td>
<td>Kander/Ebb</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Lend Me a Tenor (play)</td>
<td>Ludwig</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Jesus Christ Superstar</td>
<td>Webber/Rice</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Sondheim</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Bugsy Malone</td>
<td>Williams/Parker</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>West Side Story</td>
<td>Bernstein/Sondheim</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Big River</td>
<td>Miller</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Honk!</td>
<td>Stiles/Drewe</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>The Secret Garden</td>
<td>Simon/Norman</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>Yazbek</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Babes in Arms</td>
<td>Rodgers/Hart</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Cabaret</td>
<td>Kander/Ebb</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1966</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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659 New Zealand premiere.
660 Bryant was a performer and director.
661 Youth production.
662 Youth production.
The popularity of the American musical showed no signs of abating. Of the musicals staged, 24 (67%) were American; 7 (19%) were British; 2 (5.5%) were New Zealand, 2 (5.5%) were French and 1 (3%) was Australian. It was the first time in history that the society had mounted an Australian musical, albeit with an American connection.\(^{663}\) Moreover, a New Zealand musical had not been staged since 1930, but the society produced two Roger Hall musicals, *Love Off the Shelf* (1994) and *Making it Big* (1995). Compared with the previous era where only American and British musicals had been mounted, there was greater diversity: the society re-introduced plays and revues into its repertoire. This was due to the limitations of its new premises, and finances.

The availability of performing rights affected which shows were staged, but according to Hal Leonard Australia there is a wider range of musicals available to New Zealand and Australian companies:

> Due to our isolation and the smaller professional market in our two countries, it is common for musicals to be released to amateur companies here long before they are released in any other territories. Some examples include RENT: has been running on Broadway since 1996. A professional tour played Sydney and Melbourne in 1998/1999. Amateur rights have been available in Australia and NZ for the past three years.\(^{664}\)

To an extent, Auckland Music Theatre was following the trends of the West End and Broadway. Kenrick discusses the popular “stylish revivals” offered during the 1990s in the New York and London theatre hubs: *Carousel* (1994) and *Show Boat* (1994), for example.\(^{665}\) Auckland Music Theatre re-staged shows that had proved popular in the past: *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1997), *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (2001), *Company* (2003) and *Show Boat* (2009). The musicals of both Sondheim and Lloyd Webber, despite their widely differing styles of writing and

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\(^{663}\) The *Boy from Oz* is based on the biography of Peter Allen, an Australian performer who spent much of his life in America. He was married to Liza Minnelli for some years.

\(^{664}\) Personal communication from Erin Matheson, Hal Leonard Australia, 8 May 2008.

subject matter, were being staged with increasing frequency. This reflected the “Sondheim versus Lloyd Webber” trend, as noted by Kenrick.\(^{666}\)

Kenrick claims, however, that the London-born megamusical was losing popularity on Broadway, citing as an example *Sunset Boulevard* (London, 1993), which was a success in London but not in New York.\(^{667}\) He states that efforts to copy the British mega-style in New York were not successful, because the American public had had a surfeit of lavish spectacles. However, European-based megamusicals such as *Les Misérables* by Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil, were gaining in popularity, because they had more substance. *Les Misérables* has been staged by amateur societies and schools throughout New Zealand.

Musical theatre, nevertheless, is a dynamic genre, and there were theatrical changes afoot in America. *Beauty and the Beast* (New York, 1994), heralded the arrival of the “corporate musical”, as produced by the Disney Corporation.\(^{668}\) Although it did not win any major Tony awards, it was a huge box office success. In New Zealand, as part of a consortium during the twenty-first century, *Beauty and the Beast* has been staged successfully by amateur musical societies. High schools, particularly wealthy private ones, have staged this musical in their own right.

Part of the attraction of the corporate musical is its broad-based family appeal in terms of spectacular technical effects, visual glamour, the lack of coarse language and an absence of sex scenes. Arguably, the music does not have the same appeal as that in the musicals of yesteryear. Kenrick, however, does cite *Ragtime* (New York, 1998) as an example of “the corporate musical at its best thanks to a spectacular score by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty and an unusually strong libretto by playwright Terrence McNally”.\(^{669}\) Auckland Music Theatre successfully mounted *Ragtime* in concert in 2007.

Kenrick points out that after being a dominant force for more than 150 years, the Broadway musical was diminishing in popularity. However, the new millennium witnessed a recovery on Broadway, which corresponded with a period of stagnation in London’s West End. New shows, such as *The Producers* (2001) and *The Full Monty* (2000) in tandem with a successful revival of 42\(^{nd}\) *Street* (2001), revitalised Broadway.\(^{670}\) Both *The Full Monty* (2006) and a revival of 42\(^{nd}\) *Street* (2010), have been staged by Auckland Music Theatre.

\(^{667}\) Ibid., 352.
\(^{668}\) Ibid., 362. The corporate musical is normally produced, built and marketed by large multifaceted organizations. They often operate on a multinational level.
\(^{669}\) Ibid., 367.
\(^{670}\) Ibid., 371.
In the 1990s, however, another new trend in musicals emerged: jukebox musicals, also known as popsicals.\textsuperscript{671} \textit{Mamma Mia} (London 1999), based on the songs of the 1970s famous Swedish pop group ABBA, became a global phenomenon. Early in the new millennium, a visiting overseas professional company staged the musical in Auckland, to great acclaim. Popsicals retain some of the elements of megamusicals, with the emphasis on marketing, and replica casting and sound. However, there is a very thin plot, strung together by a collection of pop songs. Auckland Music Theatre has not staged any popsicals: it had intended to mount \textit{Dusty Springfield, the Musical}, in 2007, but the idea was abandoned owing to lack of interest from members. The musicals of Sondheim, in fact, are preferred to popsicals. One could argue either that there is still an element of elitism in the ethos of the society, or that the members have an appreciation of quality music. North Shore Music Theatre in Auckland, however, did mount the popsical \textit{The Buddy Holly Story} with some success. Kenrick comments also on a new musical comedy trend: the large-scale productions of \textit{Hairspray} (New York, 2002) and \textit{Wicked} (New York, 2003), alongside small-scale, low-budget concept musicals such as \textit{Avenue Q} (New York, 2003), featuring puppets.\textsuperscript{672}

The 1990s

As the Westpoint complex was not completed in 1993, Auckland Music Theatre mounted two major productions in the St James Theatre in Queen Street. The first was \textit{Fiddler on the Roof} in June. The “Bottle Dance” was enhanced with effective lighting, and proved popular with audiences (plate 29).

\textsuperscript{671} Kenrick, \textit{Musical Theatre: A History}, 371.
\textsuperscript{672} Ibid., 376. It has been rumoured in Auckland theatrical circles that \textit{Hairspray} will be available in 2012/13.
Many new members were recruited in the lighting, sound and backstage crews and there was a general feeling of camaraderie. Nevertheless, although *Fiddler on the Roof* was mounted in the heart of the city, the newspaper critics seemed reluctant to review it. A committee member commented that the *New Zealand Herald* had been given two complimentary tickets to the opening night, but no review had materialised. The committee sent a letter of complaint to the editor, and, subsequently, the show was reviewed enthusiastically. However, as noted, the musical recorded a loss. Despite much soul-searching, the committee was unable to find reasons for the lack of financial success.

The second major production, *The Wizard of Oz* was a colourful show with a cast of well known local performers. Although the show received glowing reviews, this was not reflected in the box office takings. In retrospect, the society acknowledged that the main cause for poor patronage may have been the fact that the musical was not staged during the school holidays.

On the other hand, suburban societies continued to thrive. During 1993, there was serious competition for Auckland Music Theatre (table 8).

### Table 8 Repertoire of Selected Suburban Societies, 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Society</th>
<th>Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Centrestage Theatre Company   | *A Slice of Saturday Night*  
**Patience**  
**Footrot Flats**  
**The Sound of Music**        |
| North Shore Music Theatre     | *La Cage aux Folles*  
**The King and I**  
**Frankenstein, the Panto**   |
| Playhouse Theatre             | *Variety Benefit Concert*  
*Rapunzel*  
**Hello Dolly!**  
One Act Play Festival  
**Annie**  
A Gilbert & Sullivan Soiree (cabaret)  
**A Small Family Business** (play)  
A Traditional Christmas Music Hall |
| Pilgrim Productions           | no major productions \(^{674}\)                                              |
| Harlequin Musical Theatre     | *The Mikado*                                                               |
| Manukau Performing Arts       | *The Sound of Music*  
*West End to Broadway* (revue) |
| Papakura Theatre Company      | *Anything Goes*  
*Nunsense*  
**Music Man**                   |
| Pukekohe Light Opera Club     | *Hello Dolly!*                                                             |

*sources: websites and official histories of the societies*

Increasingly, suburban societies had broadened their repertoire to include musicals that had never been staged by Auckland Music Theatre. Centrestage had established a youth...
theatre group in 1990, as noted in chapter eight. In 1993, their four productions all drew performers from the youth theatre group. *Footrot Flats*, by the New Zealand playwright, Roger Hall, was based on the cartoon strip by Murray Ball, and had been made into a successful movie. It is a family show with great appeal for children, as is *The Sound of Music*.

Auckland Music Theatre, however, prepared to stage its first production in the new Westpoint complex in 1994. The curved ceilings in the two main buildings presented some challenges for set designers (plates 30 and 31).

Plate 31 clearly shows the stage. Many other photographs do not reveal this area as clearly, because of the set design. The technical area was designed to accommodate the building of sets for theatres as large as the 2,200-seat Civic. In addition, this area has been
used not only for rehearsals, but also as an orchestra pit. Closed circuit television is used to view the theatre stage in the adjoining building.

The first production in the new premises was *The Seven Ages of Man* (1994), a revue devised by Brian O’Connor, a longstanding member. The revue was based on Jaques’ monologue in act 2, scene 7, from *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare. Thus copyright was not an issue, and *The Seven Ages of Man* was mounted with minimum expenditure. Indeed, with the exception of *Evita*, very low royalties were paid on the productions from 1994 to 1997 as the society struggled to remain solvent.

The most successful of the four shows presented at the complex in 1994 was *Love Off the Shelf*, an amusing satire on Mills and Boon romance novels by playwright Roger Hall. To the delight of cast members, Hall, with a group of friends, attended the opening night at Westpoint. The musical had been staged on the recommendation of Judith Mitchener, a longstanding member and costumier of the society, who had viewed the premiere at the professional Court Theatre in Christchurch some years previously.

Hall, however, commented that initially the Court Theatre had refused to stage the musical:

> *Love Off the Shelf* was to be performed in Christchurch except, when we had the read through, there were all sorts of objections, and clearly there was a major row going on. Let me explain that *Love Off the Shelf* was satirising the genre that feminists don’t appreciate. In other words, the romance novel was much despised by many people, but the novels are what they are. The whole point was that we were making fun of the genre. The interesting thing is that despite the satire, people still want the main characters to fall in love, they really do. So, although we were satirising it, we also had to obey the rules. It was a lovely show, and yet clearly at the Court there was one woman in particular who couldn’t see the funny side. Therefore, we had a read through in almost total silence... The upshot was that the Court Theatre refused to do it, which was quite extraordinary. We then did it at the Fortune Theatre, Dunedin, where it was a huge hit... Then it went to England. After that the Court... had to stage the musical.

The musical had been performed at the Nuffield Theatre at Southampton in England. Hall explained that it “was so successful that by the end of the season there were long queues at the box office hoping for returned tickets. One of the reviews said ‘this show must surely go to the West End’.” However, it was not to be. Hall said he realised in retrospect that because *Love Off the Shelf* was an ensemble show with “no real star parts”, famous performers such as Elaine Page were not interested. However, the publishing rights to the musical were purchased by Samuel French.

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676 Personal interview with Maggie Wright, 17 May 2007.
677 Personal interview with Roger Hall, 20 August 2007.
678 Ibid.
679 Ibid.
A second Roger Hall musical, *Making it Big* (1995), was staged at Westpoint with great anticipation. It had a country and western theme and was set in Invercargill, the southernmost city in the South Island of New Zealand. The plot centred on a mythical New Zealand folksinger called Jane Wineberry, and traced her road to stardom from Invercargill to Nashville and back again. *Making it Big* was Hall’s third musical, and the only one for which he had written the lyrics. Hall had scripted his first two musicals, but the lyrics had been written by A. K. Grant and the music by Philip Norman. However, for *Making it Big*, Hall decided that he would write both the script and the lyrics:

> It was a salutary lesson for me as I found writing lyrics incredibly difficult – I had thought it would be relatively easy. *Making it Big* . . . really wasn’t very successful, and I have to take responsibility for that. The script wasn’t as good as Philip’s [Norman] music. The public didn’t really latch on to this showbiz biography satire which was a rags to riches tale. . . . I’m open to anything in theatre, but writing musicals is much harder work than writing plays.680

Many of the songs had an American flavour: “This Ole Geetar of Mine”, “Come on Honey”, “Nashville” and “Disneyland”. The costumes, too, were strongly reminiscent of the American West as viewed in movies (plate 32).

Despite the efforts of an enthusiastic young cast and an experienced backstage crew, the musical recorded a loss.681 While Maggie Wright had enjoyed directing the musical, she commented that the topic and setting were too localised to be of interest to Aucklanders.682 Wright, who was English-born, compared New Zealand audiences with those in Yorkshire. She observed that if one had written a musical focussed on a small town in Yorkshire, for instance, no one outside the locality would have been interested.

680 Personal interview with Roger Hall, 20 August 2007.
681 Revenue statement, 31 December 1995.
682 Personal interview with Maggie Wright, 17 May 2007.
In 1995, Motat (Museum of Transport and Technology) approached the society with the idea of a combined theatrical production in order to market the exhibits in their museum. The society was located next door to the Motat stage 2 building, which stored World War II planes. Maggie Wright suggested that the society could stage a show commemorating World War II in the form of a revue called *Bless ‘em All*, which included forty songs of the era. Dinner could be served before the show. Motat agreed.

Consequently, the society used the Motat hangar for an army mess dinner that was served by people in military uniform. This had been arranged by the caterer, who had been hired by the society. After the public had viewed the Motat displays and eaten dinner, they walked across the courtyard to the theatre to enjoy *Bless ‘em All*. On the opening night, Motat organised boys in uniform with machine guns, tanks and searchlights outside the theatre, to create a warlike atmosphere. The theatre was packed every night for two weeks with a mature audience. A profit of $5,995 was recorded.

However, a new audience trend seemed to have emerged. Rather than familiar faces attending each succeeding show at Westpoint, new faces appeared as a “one-off”. Ian Gardiner, who joined the society in 1966 and was the chairman of the Auckland Musical Arts Trust in 2009, offered his views:

> We’ve been at Westpoint now for about fifteen years but I don’t know why we can’t get a regular audience. We’ve walked the streets doing mail drops for shows. We’ve had the odd “open home” when people have come along and said, “Oh, I didn’t know the theatre was here” - although the sign’s outside! . . . People whom I personally know came to see *Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up*? [1996]. It’s a good Catholic show. The people who came, and whom I hadn’t seen for years, were Catholics . . . they came along and loved it, but have never been back! . . . Now, we don’t get any press coverage. The *New Zealand Herald*, which is the only local paper, will not review an amateur show. There is a local rag, but they don’t review shows. They might do an article. What I don’t understand with the *Herald* is that they won’t review a community show but they will review a rock band which does one night in a pub! . . . I think that’s a sad indictment on the *Herald*, that as the only daily paper it doesn’t support community theatre.

Gardiner makes some valid observations. Undeniably, there is a wider variety of entertainment available throughout the Auckland region nowadays, and audiences are more selective. Moreover, as noted, suburban societies offer a similar repertoire to that of Auckland Music Theatre. The *New Zealand Herald*, too, was purchased by APN (Australian Provincial Newspapers) News and Media in 1996 from the local Wilson and Horton Families, who had owned the newspaper for over a century. Accordingly, with

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683 Personal interview with Maggie Wright, 17 May 2007.
684 Ibid.
the ownership of the *Herald* now in overseas hands, greater emphasis is placed on international affairs and sensationalism, and less on local communities.

The productions in 1996 showed a profit, but 1997 was one of mixed fortunes for the society. *Evita* recorded a loss of $1,995, although the musical featured experienced performers, and attracted full houses for much of the season.\(^{688}\) Traditionally *Evita* is a large show, but Brian O’Connor, the director, believed that the small theatre worked to the advantage of the musical. As O’Connor explained:

> My vision was that I wanted the audience to feel they were there in the hall at Eva’s funeral, and I think we achieved it because we were in a small theatre. They were standing there on the streets below the balcony . . . and the audience felt that they were actually there – they weren’t sitting in a large theatre with an orchestra pit in front of them watching something on stage.\(^{689}\)

Constructing the set proved difficult technically, but the end result was satisfactory. The set was built to give a two-storey effect, in order to create an effective balcony scene (plate 33). The orchestra was seated in the adjoining technical area, and closed circuit television was used to enable the cast to see the musical director.

![Plate 33 Evita (1997), the balcony scene](image)

As a result of the financial loss on *Evita*, the committee decided to produce *Music Hall* (1997) on a shoestring budget. *Music Hall* was the only cost-effective musical during 1997, resulting in a profit of $2,789.\(^{690}\) Comparing some costs for *Evita* with those of *Music Hall* is of interest. *Evita*: sound and video $3,733, royalties $2,529, set $1,434 and costumes $704. *Music Hall*: sound $0, royalties $134, set $470 and costumes $42.\(^{691}\)

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690 Annual report, 12 April 1999.
691 Income and expenditure account, 31 December 1997.
The *Music Hall* cast of eleven was a mix of experienced performers and new recruits, who made a concerted effort to sell tickets. Hence, *Music Hall* was reasonably well patronised. Several cost-cutting measures had been implemented: microphones for the singers were not used; one piano served as the musical accompaniment; and the programme, an A3 sheet of paper folded in half, did not list the items in the show but merely featured the words of the sing-a-long numbers. The cast and crew were named. Costumes from previous shows were recycled, while the set consisted of one painted backdrop (plate 34).

As 1997 was not financially successful overall, the committee was forced to re-assess the costs for future shows. Consequently, the 1998 and 1999 productions were more profitable, but the new millennium did not start well financially.

**The 2000s**

The first musical staged by Auckland Music Theatre in the new millennium was *Victor Victoria* (2000), which resulted in a loss of $5,398. The royalties were $5,843, a sum that proved impossible to recoup. Productions between 2001 and 2003 produced mixed results, but generally did not make a profit. *Company* (2003), directed by Grant Meese, won five NAPTA awards, but the musical recorded a loss.692

The year of 2004 was one of mixed fortunes for Auckland Music Theatre. *West Side Story* (2004) proved popular with younger audiences, and resulted in a profit. Moreover, the society received first prize for the *West Side Story* programme at the MTNZ conference, while the *Big River* programme won second prize plus some NAPTA awards.

Nevertheless, neither *Big River* (2004) nor *Honk!* (2005) made a profit, despite the use of cinema advertising, as previously noted. The *Secret Garden* (2005) directed by Richard Neame was a success, and won five NAPTA awards including one for best lighting design by Garth Clark.

*Babes in Arms* (2006), a youth production, recorded a loss of $4,397, although many block bookings were organised to bolster seat sales. The society had been certain that *Babes in Arms* would generate a profit: their rationale for staging the production had been to attract family and friends, with the aim of establishing a youth theatre. It was not to be, however. First, many performers were already part of the established youth theatre of their local societies such as Centrestage and Pu kekohe Light Opera Club. Second, travelling long distances for rehearsals and performances was difficult, because it relied on the goodwill of parents: the children were too young to have a driver’s licence. Third, there was not the same prestige attached to Westpoint, compared with the bygone days of performing at His Majesty’s Theatre.

*Cabaret* (2006), on the other hand, proved a great success. As royalties were expensive, sponsors were persuaded to provide financial backing. The production was not without its problems, nonetheless. When the scores and scripts were received, it was discovered that extra songs were available. However, Tams-Witmark refused permission for those songs to be added to the show, but did not state its reasons. This illustrates the continuing control exercised by copyright holders, especially Tams-Witmark, a company which had proved difficult to deal with over the years. The director of the musical resigned in frustration and was replaced at short notice by the choreographer, who took on the dual role of director/choreographer. *Cabaret* recorded a profit of $8,473. Seating capacity was just under eighty per cent.

Late in 2006 Auckland Music Theatre approached Adey Ramsel, a young English-born impresario, actor and playwright who was domiciled in Auckland, with a view to mounting a joint production. Ramsel owned a small professional theatre company called Caught Jesters, and regularly produced plays in various parts of Auckland. Subsequently, the New Zealand premiere of the play, *The Opposite Sex*, was produced in 2007 at Westpoint. A budget and a Memorandum of Understanding were drawn up. There

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693 Nowadays, microphones are normally used. However, microphones were not used for *Honk!* and, while the performers were perfectly audible, there were complaints from the audience.
694 Committee minutes, 12 June 2006.
695 Ibid.
696 Ibid.
697 Ibid.
698 Committee minutes, 10 July 2006.
699 Ibid.
were four people in the cast, all of whom signed agreements with Caught Jesters, which undertook to pay them an undisclosed fee. Thus, the cast were employed by Caught Jesters rather than Auckland Music Theatre. Royalties were paid by Caught Jesters, and Ramsel was responsible for directing the play. However, Auckland Music Theatre appointed the costumier and set, props, lighting and sound designers. As the two organisations were co-producers, the budget and the profits were split 50/50. The play was not eligible for NAPTA, because the cast were paid professionals. As Caught Jesters had its own following, there were many new faces in the audience. Some expressed an interest in musicals, and joined Auckland Music Theatre. The society recorded a profit of $5,352, after an initial financial outlay of $4,000.699

The New Zealand premiere of Ragtime the Musical in concert (2007) directed by Sherrin Scelly, with lighting design by Garth Clark, was received enthusiastically by the general public, and was an interesting show from many angles. It was the first time that the society had staged a musical in concert version. Moreover, the largest orchestra for some years, comprising twenty-six musicians, was used. The production team numbered more than forty. Furthermore, it was the largest cast in recent history with sixteen principals, twelve singers in the Harlem ensemble, and sixteen in the New Rochelle ensemble. The vivid lighting on the cyclorama in the opening scene formed an effective backdrop for the cast and orchestra (plate 35).

Plate 35 Ragtime (2007), act 1, scene 1: Younger Brother, Mother, Father, Grandfather and the Little Boy (from stage right). Harlem Ensemble (stage right) and New Rochelle Ensemble (stage left) 
by kind permission Auckland Musical Arts Trust

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699 Annual general minutes, 26 March 2007.
As required by the rights holders, the society advertised for “two black singers” as well as “Maori/Pacific Island performers” to play the roles of the African Americans.\textsuperscript{700} This led to some unexpected challenges. Val Hemphill, who had assisted with choreography for \textit{Ragtime}, explained:

When we did \textit{Ragtime} recently, we had a problem with the Maori and Polynesian performers not turning up for rehearsals. . . . They didn’t always turn up on the show nights either. It was hilarious, but stressful, because for the last couple of shows the Maori/Polynesian contingent decided amongst themselves to change the lines in that instead of one person saying them, as had been allocated by the director, they shared the lines out amongst themselves! . . . It also varied from night to night as to who said what lines. . . . I hadn’t come across that situation before. . . . However, the elderly Maori gentleman who played the part of Booker T. Washington was totally professional, turned up every night, and knew his lines.\textsuperscript{701}

Although the possibility of staging \textit{Ragtime} in alternative larger theatres was explored, enquiries confirmed that a venue other than Westpoint would be too expensive.\textsuperscript{702} There were some concerns from the creative team that the musical underscoring would drown the principals when they were speaking; thus, anyone who spoke a line needed a microphone.\textsuperscript{703} As the cost of an additional eight microphones was $2,000, two handhelds were hired instead, one for each side of the stage.

Intensive marketing in the form of radio and newspaper advertising proceeded. Panasonic, NEO People Ltd, Speedy Signs and Sanstar Creative, amongst others, were approached for sponsorship.\textsuperscript{704} Although the advertising budget was minimal, the downgrading of the programmes to one double-sided A4 sheet of paper helped to lower costs. Moreover, some members of the cast donated their $10 script money.\textsuperscript{705} An informal fundraising concert featuring the music of Lloyd Webber was staged in May 2007. The choreographer had donated her $250 choreography fee, and suggested the money be used to purchase a seat for the theatre.

Special guests were invited to the preview night for \textit{Ragtime}: the American Consulate, Erin Matheson from Hal Leonard the copyright holder in Australia, life members and volunteers.\textsuperscript{706} The eight-night season played to capacity houses, as Aucklanders took the toe-tapping ragtime music to their hearts. The committee considered re-staging \textit{Ragtime} for another season in a bigger venue, but this proved unrealistic.

\textsuperscript{700} Committee minutes, 17 January 2007.
\textsuperscript{701} Personal interview with Val Hemphill, 8 August 2007. Hemphill had been a professional dancer in England, before migrating to New Zealand thirty years previously.
\textsuperscript{702} Committee minutes, 11 November 2006.
\textsuperscript{703} Committee minutes, 11 June 2007.
\textsuperscript{704} \textit{Ragtime} programme, June 2007.
\textsuperscript{705} Committee minutes, 16 July 2007. As had been the practice for some years, the cast were required to pay $10 deposit for a script. That amount was forfeited if the script was not returned.
\textsuperscript{706} Committee minutes, 19 May 2007.
financially. It was anticipated, however, that the set and costumes could be hired to other societies.

*Hair* (2007), which was performed with a young cast, some of whom were in their late teens, proved an artistic and financial success. Young audiences flocked to see the musical. Audition notices on the website, and elsewhere, had stated clearly that the cast were required to strip naked at some point.\(^{707}\) The director, Glen Pickering, had an innovative approach which involved reconfiguring the auditorium, no mean feat. As he declared in the programme:

> From my first reading I knew that I couldn’t direct *Hair* like any other show. There were no rules, formulas, or boundaries. *Hair* is open to interpretation, exploration, experimentation and renovation. . . . *Hair* is a piece of avant-garde theatre. You can’t look for literal ideas that follow one from the other, it is about presenting the audience big ideas and allowing these to create a whole. Therefore, I asked my cast to be brave. Not only have they had to open themselves up emotionally, but to work in a style of theatre that isn’t common to musicals is a challenge.\(^{708}\)

The statement by the director in 2007 that he considered *Hair* “a piece of avant-garde theatre” was thought-provoking. If anything, in some ways the musical seemed rather dated. On the other hand, perhaps the younger generation considered that there were many similar dilemmas to the Vietnam War, with the present wars on terror. *Hair* received an award from NAPTA for best supporting ensemble. It was noteworthy that both the Marist and Pt Chevalier School Parent Teachers’ Associations made a block booking to view *Hair*. This reflected the changing times: when the musical had been staged in 1991, similar groups had protested loudly at the nudity and coarse language.

The society was investigating various avenues for widening its audience base. Therefore, the approach by the gay and lesbian community in regard to staging a play to coincide with the annual Hero Parade in the central business district was opportune.\(^{709}\) Consequently, in February 2008 the society successfully presented *Beautiful Thing*, directed by Richard Neame, at Westpoint.

*The Boy from Oz*, directed by Simon Coleman, tells the story of Peter Allen, and was well-supported by the general public. The musical received the NAPTA award for best leading male (Richard Neame) and best choreography. *Putting it Together*, directed by John Fausett, received five awards from NAPTA: best sound design, best vocal work by a company, best musical direction, best direction and best musical. All in all, 2008 was a successful year both financially and artistically.

\(^{707}\) Annual general meeting minutes, 7 April 2008.  
\(^{708}\) *Hair* (2007) programme. Pickering is a graduate of the Unitec School of Performing and Screen Arts in Auckland, with a major in acting.  
\(^{709}\) Committee minutes, 11 June 2007. This was the only production staged in conjunction with the gay and lesbian community.
To celebrate its ninetieth jubilee in 2009, shows were carefully chosen to reflect the history of the society and to appeal to all sectors of the audience. The first production for the year was *La Cage aux Folles*, a musical which portrayed a gay relationship between its two leading characters. It featured stylish costumes and energetic dance routines. The spectacular Can Can, which included male and female dancers, was enhanced by effective lighting (plate 36).

As the budget allocation of $35,000 was the biggest one to date at Westpoint, the committee felt some trepidation. However, *La Cage aux Folles* played to full houses. It received several NAPTA awards, including best performed choreography by a company, best choreography, best costume design, best direction and best musical. It was John Fausett’s second award for best direction, but the first time in the short history of NAPTA that someone had received the award in two consecutive years.

The second production, *Assassins*, was directed by Richard Neame. This musical had been chosen because the committee believed that the society had earned a well-deserved reputation for producing Sondheim skilfully. Reaction from audiences, however, fluctuated between appreciating the brilliance of Sondheim, and feeling dismayed by the unsavoury characters. *Assassins* was not a success financially.

*Show Boat*, directed by Anthony Carroll, was the third production. It was a tribute to older-style musicals and proved a success. A twenty-one piece orchestra accompanied

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710 Annual report, 29 March 2010.
711 This was “the first Broadway musical to feature a gay relationship between its lead characters, to dignify that relationship, and to go on to become a blockbuster hit”. As cited in Stempel, 662.
713 Ibid.
714 Ibid.
the young cast. The musical received a NAPTA award for best sound and best vocal work by a company. The tiny marketing budget had been spent mainly on iTicket, which had increased the audience base: when the society added the “allowable” names to its database after each production, the list of new patrons increased.\textsuperscript{715}

As it transpired, 2009 proved a landmark year for Auckland Music Theatre. The chairman was pleased to announce that the society had signed an agreement with Amici Productions, which was sponsoring a production of \textit{Rent} and a revival of \textit{42nd Street} at the prestigious Civic Theatre in Queen Street during 2010.\textsuperscript{716} It was a proud moment in the ninety-year history of the society as sixteen years had passed since the society last performed in Queen Street.

\textbf{Conclusion}

For the first time in its history, the society was based in the inner western suburbs of Auckland after a lifetime in the inner city. There were many adjustments to be made, including the acquisition of a new theatre audience. Locals in Western Springs and Pt Chevalier seemed reluctant to support the society, despite the many marketing campaigns instigated in the district. The society had anticipated that because its premises were now located in close proximity to Motat, this would assist in attracting new audiences. It proved not to be the case.

A core of loyal members continued to support the society: many had been associated with the society for over forty years. Efforts were made, nonetheless, to encourage younger members to join. Indeed, for the first time in its history, Auckland Music Theatre mounted two youth productions. While those productions attracted some new young performers, many came from the youth theatre of societies in other parts of Auckland and, consequently, did not become regular members. Other possibilities were investigated, however. In 1995 the society staged a musical commemorating World War II, in conjunction with Motat. In addition, it staged a play, \textit{Beautiful Thing}, to coincide with the annual Hero Parade at the behest of the gay and lesbian community in 2008. Choice of repertoire was a continuing challenge: the society attempted to give both older and younger members the opportunity to participate in shows, while meeting audience

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{715}Annual report, 29 March 2010.
\textsuperscript{716}Informally, a figure of $1.2 million was quoted as the cost to stage \textit{42nd Street}. Six of the principals were paid, with a New Zealander who had achieved moderate fame in Australia, being imported from Sydney. A Broadway choreographer was imported to assist Val Hemphill, the local choreographer. If one compares the cost of \textit{42nd Street} in the prime Queen Street location, with the $35,000 budget for \textit{La Cage} in 2009, it is obvious that the cost differential is unbridgeable without sponsorship.
\end{footnotesize}
expectations. There was increasing competition from suburban groups and high schools, which were producing both an extensive repertoire and a high level of performing.

The society explored new avenues to finance its shows, restructured the committee, and ventured into the field of information and communications technology. It also implemented policies for ensuring that ever-increasing legal requirements were met. Although professionals in particular fields such as marketing were employed occasionally, the society relied heavily on volunteers for its day-to-day operations.

Auckland Music Theatre staged two New Zealand musicals and one Australian musical, as well as plays and revues. One play was staged in conjunction with a professional theatre troupe. Until 1994 the society had staged its productions in various theatres in Auckland. However, from the time that Westpoint became available, the society used only this facility for its productions up to, and including, 2009.
CHAPTER TEN

Conclusion

Preamble

Auckland, from its colonial beginnings, was stigmatised by those outside the region as a settlement that was more interested in commerce than the arts. This perception, which is a debatable one in view of the significant number of musical and theatrical societies that are domiciled in the Auckland region, lingers to the present day. The legacy of Auckland Music Theatre, the oldest surviving theatrical society in the region, confirms that Auckland has a considerable performing arts heritage because of the substantial input of ordinary people to civic life.

As argued by the microhistorians Giovanni Levi, Carlo Ginzburg and Georg Iggers, a seemingly insignificant act by an ordinary person reflects a much wider social picture. Indeed, the day-to-day routines that were established by Auckland Music Theatre in order to mount theatrical productions substantiate this. The records provide ample evidence that the history of the society, in fact, provides a microcosm not only for the changing face of musical theatre, but also for the development of the Auckland region.

This microhistory has addressed the research question: how did Auckland Music Theatre Inc., adapt to changing social, economic and aesthetic issues affecting the realm of musical theatre? The history of the first ninety years of the society, from its inception in 1919, was examined in the context of the evolving urban environment of the Auckland region. As a range of people provided a musical foundation well before the establishment of Auckland Music Theatre, however, the theatrical milieu of Auckland from 1841 to 1918 was also explored.

This thesis was inspired by John Lowerson’s definitive study of the social and cultural history of amateur operatics in Great Britain, its former empire and elsewhere. With regard to New Zealand amateur operatics, Lowerson observed that much more local research was required before a clear picture could emerge. Consequently, this thesis has continued the research commenced by Lowerson. I chose to focus on Auckland: it is the largest city by a considerable measure and comprises one-third of the population of New Zealand.

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Zealand, yet is generally overlooked as a cultural centre. Moreover, in the present multicultural climate, with its ever-increasing emphasis on Polynesian and Asian cultures, the significant contribution by European art forms to the social and cultural fabric of Auckland society is often ignored.

A review of the meagre amount of literature that addresses the contribution of amateur musical theatre to Auckland (and New Zealand) reinforced the need for further study. In order to research the historical background, concepts, and related issues, literature was studied from a range of fields: musical theatre, operetta, opera, microhistory, historiography, social and cultural theory, sociology, anthropology, ethnology, biography and New Zealand history.

Archival material from a variety of sources, including the records of Auckland Music Theatre, private collections and newspapers, was used as the basis for the study. This was supplemented by the interviews of twenty-four practitioners who have helped to shape both amateur and professional musical theatre in the Auckland region. Some practitioners have worked with theatrical societies throughout New Zealand. It is appreciated that oral interviews are not always considered to be reliable. Nevertheless, because there are so few literary sources that document the history of musical theatre in Auckland, the perceptions and hands-on experience of the people interviewed for this thesis are significant. These practitioners have been, or are, at the forefront of the industry. While the literature that has been examined in chapter one offers an important contribution, few of the authors have been actively involved in musical theatre in Auckland.

This chapter summarises the key findings. In so doing, it addresses the themes that have been central to the study: the role played by European operetta, the British musical and the American musical in the establishment of a repertoire; the amateur/professional juxtaposition; and the social tone of Auckland society, which had its genesis in British cultural values. The various changes in the dynamic genre of musical theatre have had a major impact on the repertoire and operations of Auckland Music Theatre. Consequently, this aspect was entwined with other sub-themes: the constraints of copyright and the influence of the media.

**Survival Strategies**

Auckland Music Theatre has faced numerous challenges over its lifetime with regard to the changing face of musical theatre and the commercial stage. The evolution of
the Auckland region, too, with its changing demographics and urban sprawl has impinged significantly on the operations of the society. To an extent, the status of the society has been affected by relocation. Initially, the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society was the most influential theatre group in the prestigious inner city, performing at His Majesty’s Theatre. By 1993 it was located in the suburban inner west and, from 1994, mounted productions in its own 122-seat theatre. However, the use of smaller theatres reflects a wider trend. The professional Auckland Theatre Company, for example, generally stages productions, which sporadically include a musical, in the 200-seat Herald Theatre in the Aotea Centre in the central business district.

Increasing competition from movies, television and other forms of entertainment has also been a factor. Prior to the 1960s, an outing to a stage show was the major affordable entertainment. After the 1960s, there were more calls on the limited entertainment budget of families. This included evening sports fixtures. Until the early 1990s, daily newspapers reviewed amateur shows. Although the reviews were not always flattering, they offered an independent and informed glance at amateur shows by notable critics such as L. C. M. Saunders. It was also a form of free advertising.

There are many reasons why Auckland Music Theatre has survived while other theatrical groups have not. The ability of the society to adapt to changing conditions has been one of its greatest strengths. Indeed, over its lifetime the society has developed a highly-organised infrastructure capable of supporting the growth of theatre, using the following strategies:

1. changing its name to reflect a contemporary image in line with developments in the genre of musical theatre;
2. relocating its headquarters from the city to the inner western suburbs as Auckland expanded;
3. purchasing its premises;
4. establishing the Auckland Musical Arts Trust in 1966 to protect the assets of the society;
5. constructing a purpose-built theatre in both Bowen Avenue and Western Springs;
6. setting up an impressive hireage facility that is used by a range of organisations, both amateur and professional;
7. encouraging influential people to serve on the committee;
8. adapting management policies to safeguard finances and meet all legal obligations including the Charitable Trusts Act 1957;
9. instigating marketing campaigns and feasibility studies and implementing
technology to extend the audience and membership base;
10. updating marketing techniques for shows from newspaper advertising to radio,
television and screen, and social media;
11. using volunteer labour;
12. seeking sponsorship;
13. staging productions in smaller venues to reduce costs and experiment with new
musicals;
14. organising training workshops in all facets of theatre to ensure a continuing high
standard of performance;
15. constantly updating the repertoire in line with the dynamic genre of musical theatre;
16. complying with copyright regulations such as advertising for persons of a certain
ethnicity to play certain roles;
17. adapting to changes in set design, lighting and sound by modernising its own
equipment and hiring from professionals when necessary;
18. assisting in the establishment of Musical Theatre New Zealand, the umbrella
organisation for the performing arts;
19. increasing its visibility and sphere of influence in the arts by collaborating with
other amateur societies and professional bodies;
20. employing professional entertainers in leading roles on occasion to boost box office
takings;
21. rewarding members with life membership, merit awards and/or an invitation to
serve in the honorary positions of patron or president;
22. attempting to promote a sense of camaraderie by organising social functions.

My original intention had been to create a list of strategies neatly divided into three
categories: aesthetic, social and economic. Nonetheless, this proved impracticable as some
of the issues fall under two or more headings. For example, the construction of a theatre
could be regarded as an aesthetic, social and economic issue. Accordingly, the strategies
adopted by the society in response to the changing times are listed in numerical order for
ease of reference, but are not necessarily in order of importance.

A striking feature of the above list is the predominance of economic factors. This
reinforces the importance of the commercial element, despite the fact that the society is an
amateur one. Ostensibly, therefore, while it is not the commercial stage in the sense of
professional theatre, finances are no less important in the amateur realm.
The changes of name from the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society to Auckland Operatic Society and then to Auckland Music Theatre, reflect an attempt by the society to present a contemporary image. They also illustrate the changes in the genre of musical theatre. The term “music theatre” is an American influence and reflects the present repertoire of Auckland Music Theatre. Only two other societies in the Auckland region have changed their name to include the term “music theatre”: North Shore Music Theatre and Harlequin Musical Theatre. The Pukekohe Light Opera Club, on the other hand, has retained its original name. However, this does not necessarily reflect its repertoire.

The minutes of meetings over the lifespan of Auckland Music Theatre show that members have made a determined effort to ensure financial viability. Thus, feasibility studies have been conducted, the committee has been restructured several times, and rules have been amended to meet changing demands. Since the 1920s the society has owned its premises, which has provided a home base and a good source of income from hireage. Additionally, in 1966 the Auckland Musical Arts Trust was established to protect the assets of the society. This was a crucial decision: on more than one occasion the society experienced major financial difficulties but, fortuitously, was able to borrow funds from the trust. Two inner-city rivals, Theatre Arts and the Auckland Light Opera Club, did not survive owing to financial problems.

The traditional audience base for Auckland Music Theatre comprised members, locals and those from outlying suburbs who travelled regularly into the city to view the major productions at His Majesty’s Theatre. Since the society relocated to Western Springs, it has been poorly supported by locals, despite the marketing campaigns that have been launched in the area. Thus, audiences in 1994 comprised an ever-diminishing base of loyal older members, and the whimsical general public who came from far and wide to view a show often as a one-off. Nevertheless, from 2004 the society has made extensive use of information and communications technology, as discussed in chapter nine. This has created an ever-expanding online community that supports the society, and has resulted in increased membership. Thus, the society has adapted to the digital age.

Auckland Music Theatre has always relied on volunteers who have donated their time and labour free of charge to the society. This includes committee members, front-of-house and box office helpers, performers and technical crews. While directors, musical directors and choreographers are normally paid a fee, many donate it back to the society. Members have also voluntarily contributed manual labour for the building and maintenance of the premises of the society. Thus, time and energy has been donated on “both sides of the curtain”. In addition, some volunteers also provide considerable funding
in the form of sponsorship: DAS Training Solutions, Hugh Kenderdine, Terry O’Connor, Sanstar Creative and Speedy Signs. Although volunteers form the backbone of many organisations, no other theatrical society in the region has been able to equal the record of longevity set by Auckland Music Theatre.

**Rival Societies and Schools**

As discussed in chapters eight and nine, suburban societies are providing increasing competition. Over the years, the high standard offered by some societies has matched, if not surpassed, that of Auckland Music Theatre. This is reflected in the annual NAPTA awards: top honours in the various categories are normally awarded to a range of societies. Not one society appears to dominate. This is due, partly, to the fact that performers, musical directors and directors tend to circulate around the Auckland region and other parts of New Zealand. Thus, many theatrical groups benefit from the shared expertise. In addition, societies arrange their own training workshops in all aspects of theatre. With the advent of Music Theatre New Zealand, moreover, there has been a greater degree of cooperation between societies. For instance, show dates tend to be staggered wherever possible so that Auckland societies do not mount productions concurrently.

While Auckland Music Theatre has extended its hireage facility, which has the largest stock of costumes and properties in the region, other societies have broadened their range of activities in other ways. Centrestage Theatre Company, for instance, established a youth theatre group in 1990 which operates in conjunction with their mainstream productions. This has assisted in expanding their audience base. The Pukekohe Light Opera Club set up a youth theatre in 1994. Moreover, since 2002 they have provided drama classes and production assistance for IDEA, a group that is under the auspices of the Intellectually Handicapped Children’s (IHC) Manukau Counties Branch Committee. The intention is to raise awareness of the plight of marginalised people.

On the other hand, Pilgrim Productions, which was formed in 1978, is a church-based marginal theatrical group. It produces musicals such as *Godspell* and *Pippin* that are based on Christian values. Both the IDEA group and Pilgrim Productions have managed to create theatrical awareness in the wider community. The Playhouse Theatre, which is an amalgamation of three theatre groups that included the Auckland Children’s Light Opera, has an inbuilt youth group (Appendix 2). Thus, like Pukekohe and Centrestage, they do have a youth theatre which provides up-and-coming performers and technical and creative personnel.
With the inclusion of Performance Programmes in Music, Dance and Drama in the mainstream curriculum for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), schools are providing competition for musical societies. On the other hand, when students audition for societies, they are often fairly experienced because of their training in school. According to several interviewees, this has raised the standard of amateur musical theatre and worked to the advantage of local societies.\footnote{Personal interview with Ian Gardiner, 19 January 2008.}

**British Influences**

John Lowerson observed that New Zealand is not “a miniaturised version of older British values and suburbia”.\footnote{Lowerson, *Amateur Operatics*, 217.} Nevertheless, as pointed out in chapter three of this thesis, musical culture in 1841 Auckland reflected the traditional British values of the time. Theatre operated as a long distance extension of the London stage, because New Zealand was ruled by British law.\footnote{Although some American minstrelsy influences such as the olio were evident as early as 1844, the full impact of American musicals was not experienced until the twentieth century.}

Lowerson points out that amateur operatics in Great Britain was a largely middle class pursuit. However, it was also a working class activity in certain parts of the country.\footnote{Ibid., 5.} The participants of amateur operatics, therefore, varied from middle to working class, depending on the location and demographics of their particular village. Auckland did not have the same stratified class society as Great Britain. Nonetheless, the migrant population of 1841 Auckland consisted mainly of government officials, the military and their families, who were the elite society. They had brought with them certain cultural and social values, including notions of gentility, which may have outweighed their status in Great Britain.

Undeniably, social acceptance was based on the status of the protagonists. As discussed in chapter three, George Buckingham and Mrs Foley, who were professional actors and family people, were viewed as upright citizens. Consequently, their theatrical ventures were supported by the public, as were the vocal classes of Thomas Outhwaite, registrar of the Supreme Court. Likewise, the Auckland Amateur Dramatic Society and Military Theatre, established in 1848 by government officials and the military respectively, were well received. On the other hand, David Osborne a Scottish migrant who staged the first theatrical production in Auckland in 1841, was perceived as an unsavoury character. His theatrical venture, consequently, was not supported. The aura of
elitism that surrounded certain theatrical activities continued into the eras of both the Auckland Amateur Opera Club and the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, now Auckland Music Theatre.

As discussed in chapter four, the Auckland Amateur Opera Club, founded between 1883 and 1884, was the first local society to regularly offer productions that were staged in the West End theatres of London. The social status of the people who established the opera club added prestige to the undertaking. Judge Francis Dart Fenton was a local identity, while Dr Carl Schmitt was the first incumbent of the Chair of Music at the Auckland University College. Another feature that added cachet was the input from musicians who had trained in Europe during this era. European-born Schmitt and Australian-born Alfred Hill are two examples. It is apparent from a reading of the local newspapers that the opera club was an integral part of the elite social life of Auckland. Members of the opera club featured in the theatre and social columns. Indeed, the newspapers also displayed some elements of elitism, because the pseudonyms used by the critics included names with a scholarly connotation, such as Strephon.

Auckland Music Theatre, too, appeared to be an exclusive society in its early years, as was evident from the strict rules that applied to applications for membership. As Vivian Jacobs pointed out, during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s when he was a member of the society there was much prestige attached to appearing in shows. It was perceived as “mixing in the right circles”\(^\text{722}\) However, as the decades progressed and a wider range of entertainment became available, the society struggled to gain new members. Consequently, there was a relaxation in the rules for membership. Nowadays, anyone can apply and be accepted, provided their membership fee is paid.

The evolving face of Auckland society is revealed very clearly in the status of the persons who were invited to undertake the honorary positions of patron and president of theatrical societies. During the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, the patron was the lieutenant-governor or the governor-general. Advertisements for shows normally acknowledged the patronage. For example, in 1852 one advertisement for the Military Theatre read: “Under the Patronage of His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor and Mrs. Wynyard” (The New-Zealander, 12 June 1852).

From 1919 to 1973, the programmes of Auckland Music Theatre show that the patron was the governor-general of New Zealand. The president was normally an illustrious citizen or the mayor of Auckland. From 1974 to the present, the patron has been

\(^{722}\) Personal interview with Vivian Jacobs, 23 June 2007.
a respected, high-profile member of the society. In 2009, the patron of Auckland Music Theatre, for instance, is a businessman and entrepreneur whose financial contribution to the society has been significant. By 2006, the mayor of Auckland was no longer the president. Rather, an older member of the society who had made a substantial contribution in terms of time and effort was preferred. Both positions are now filled by “ordinary people” rather than status symbols. The vice-presidents are respected older members.

On a more personal note, as discussed in chapter two, the twenty-four people who were interviewed for this thesis all have a British heritage to a greater or lesser extent. Three were born in England: Roger Hall, Val Hemphill and Maggie Wright. As noted elsewhere, Hall is New Zealand’s most famous playwright: his plays and musicals are being produced at home and abroad in both the professional and amateur arena. Wright is the longest-serving director in the history of Auckland Music Theatre and its first female chairperson. Hemphill is one of the longest-serving choreographers for the society. All three have contributed their expertise to societies throughout New Zealand. Since the 1960s, four English-born persons have served as chairmen: Rex Sayers, Roy Severs, Leslie Maynard and Maggie Wright.723 As noted, Colin Muston, the longest-serving musical director of the society was also English-born. This follows the trend, as pointed out by John Lowerson, that British settlers had input into the growth of amateur operatics in countries outside of Britain.

American Influences

Theatre in Auckland has been influenced by American elements over many decades. The American theatrical entrepreneur J. C. Williamson was an extremely influential figure by 1879 when he acquired the rights to the Savoy operas of Gilbert and Sullivan, as discussed in chapter four. During the era of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club, Williamson’s company monopolised copyright. Moreover, they owned and leased many theatres throughout both New Zealand and Australia. Costumes and sets were also available for hire or purchase from Williamson’s until the 1970s.

The American troops who were stationed in Auckland and other parts of New Zealand during World War II proved popular with the local population. As discussed in chapter five, John Cowie Reid stated in 1946 that New Zealanders were already addicted to “American films, magazines and music”.724 By the 1950s, American popular music and

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723 It is difficult to ascertain how many English-born persons held positions of authority prior to the 1960s.
724 Reid, Creative Writing in New Zealand, 6.
Hollywood musicals were a pervasive influence. Since the 1960s the ever-expanding plethora of American television programmes has continued to influence the lifestyle of Aucklanders. American food outlets and designer label clothes proliferate. An informal survey of friends and acquaintances revealed that Aucklanders are more likely to have visited Los Angeles or New York than Wellington, Dunedin or Christchurch. Accordingly, American musicals and the extensive marketing conducted by Disney and others are part of a much larger social picture.

Amateur and Professional Collaboration

The evolving meaning of the terms “amateur” and “professional” was addressed at length in the introduction and referred to at various points throughout the thesis. Criteria for the discussion included the literal meaning of the words amateur and professional, as well as standards, status, attitude and payment. This was based on the research of both F. H. Shera and Robert Stebbins.

In Auckland, however, there is little differentiation between amateurs and professionals in theatre. As pointed out by Ray Dormer, a professional entertainer, audiences tend to be theatrically informed nowadays because of easy access to television, DVDs, information and communications technology and overseas travel. Consequently, the general public expect a high standard of performance regardless of whether they are viewing amateur or professional theatre. In fact, if they attend a performance at the Civic Theatre, which is a professional venue, the assumption is that the show is being staged by professionals.

Despite the expectations of audiences, however, it became clear during the interviews conducted for this thesis that performers, creative teams and technical crews all feel compelled to achieve consistently professional standards. The degree of commitment is high: it is driven by a passion for the arts rather than financial reward. The recognition and the enjoyment gained from being involved in a theatrical performance provide great motivation. Certainly, the term “modern amateurism” that has been coined by Robert Stebbins, where amateurs approach their leisure seriously in terms of standards and commitment, is apposite. As amateurs often have more time to devote to updating their skills, they may have a higher degree of knowledge than the professionals in some cases.

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725 This informal survey was undertaken by the author as a matter of personal interest, but there is no official documentation.
As pointed out by Stebbins, the modern amateur is sometimes paid for his theatrical services and may eventually become a professional.

As several interviewees commented, however, the standard of performance has been raised to a level that is too high for some enthusiastic novices. In the 1960s, for example, the chorus consisted of a mix of singers: some had undertaken vocal training while others had not. Often the novices would undertake vocal tuition when they joined the society. Moreover, the chorus were generally not required to dance. Ballets were for trained dancers. Thus, there was a clear division between the chorus and the dancers. Nowadays, performers are required to sing, dance and act with an equal degree of proficiency. Ray Dormer, who directed many musicals in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, observed:

In any cast I ever had, there were always a few people that I used to call my “potplants”. Those potplants had to stand up the back and not move, just sing or do general voice things and enter or exit, and that’s all they did. There were always potplants in my productions; that’s just a sad reality. I’m now seeing less potplants on stage.728

Auckland Music Theatre has also collaborated with professional entrepreneurs. In 1981 when the Auckland Operatic Society staged Annie, the set which was hired from the Hamilton Operatic Society had been purchased from a professional company. Moreover, the musical was staged in conjunction with Michael Edgley International, a company which normally imported and promoted professional shows. Consequently, while the performers were not paid, the production values were such that audiences were convinced a professional overseas company had staged Annie. As discussed in chapter nine, Auckland Music Theatre collaborated with the professional theatre company Caught Jesters. Expenses were shared for the play The Opposite Sex, which was staged at Westpoint. A profit was recorded and the society acquired some new members.

As noted in chapter eight, when the Arts Advocates group was established in 1986, both amateur and professional societies were invited to participate. Indeed, Ian Gardiner, an amateur performer who was vice chairman of Auckland Music Theatre at the time, was elected to the executive committee of the Arts Advocates. He served on that committee for seventeen years, until 2003.

As discussed in chapter five, Statistics New Zealand does not differentiate between professionals and amateurs when compiling figures for audience attendance at performing arts attractions. In fact, opera and musical theatre are grouped together. Musical Theatre New Zealand (MTNZ) welcomes both amateurs and professionals as members.

Accordingly, its membership embraces not only amateur societies, but also professional theatre groups and Australia-based copyright holders such as Hal Leonard.

In 1938, F. H. Shera explained that an amateur had a higher status historically than a professional, because the eighteenth-century amateur was a gentleman player who could afford the luxury of playing music for pleasure, unlike the paid professional. It is of interest that Auckland Music Theatre, an amateur society, has owned its premises since the 1920s, albeit in three different geographical locations. Those premises have been hired to many arts organisations including professional companies such as Opera New Zealand. Although the society charges a hireage fee, there is a parallel with the gentleman amateur: it is the amateurs rather than the professionals who own the asset. Costumes and properties, too, are hired to various enterprises throughout New Zealand and sometimes overseas.

Based on the material that was available in the newspapers of the day, the differentiation between amateurs and professionals did not seem to be an issue from 1841 to 1882. Indisputably, amateurs and professionals worked together, and some amateurs were paid, but there was no evidence to suggest that this caused acrimony. However, in the period from 1883 to 1902, during which time the Auckland Amateur Opera Club was a major arts force, the amateur/professional interface was the subject of much discussion in the local newspapers. In the opinion of the journalists, professional performers were entitled to payment, but amateurs were not. Their reasoning was simple: for professionals, theatre was their full-time occupation, whereas for amateurs, theatre was a leisure pursuit. This perception was entrenched.

In the era of Auckland Music Theatre, the issue of payment does not seem to have been aired in the public forum despite the fact that amateurs and professionals often work together. During the 1940s, as there was limited professional theatre in the Auckland region, the Centennial Committee asked the society for assistance with a nationwide production of *Faust* (1940) for the centennial celebration. The imported professionals for the leading roles were paid, but the local amateur performers were not. Vivian Jacobs, who sang in the chorus of *Faust*, observed that having the opportunity to perform in the opera was reward in itself. In 1948, the New Zealand Broadcasting Service and the National Orchestra requested that the society assist with the professional production of *Carmen*. Again, the overseas professionals were paid but the locals were not.

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730 Personal interview with Vivian Jacobs, 23 June 2007.
The minutes of Auckland Music Theatre do state clearly when professional performers are engaged, although the fee is not necessarily disclosed. Professionals are normally invited to play the leading role in a production with the aim of attracting a wider audience. Although paid professionals can raise the general standard of performance, their presence does not guarantee box office success, as in the case of *Hans Christian Andersen*, for example.

Another point is that professionals do sometimes audition and perform free of charge because of the opportunity to play a particular, much desired, role. Doreen Donnell quoted her own example. Donnell, who has performed in both amateur and professional theatre, played the role of Grace in the Auckland Music Theatre production of *Annie* (1981), while her husband, Ken Donnell, appeared as Warbucks. An unexpected outcome was that Ken Donnell was invited to reprise the role for various amateur musical theatre societies throughout New Zealand. This case is not unusual. Travel, accommodation expenses and a meal allowance are normally paid, as is a performance fee. Directors, musical directors and choreographers who work outside of Auckland, are normally recompensed for travel, accommodation and meals, in addition to a fee.

There are some legal complications nowadays, as raised in chapter nine. The Internal Revenue Department has measures in place to ensure that societies retain their status as charitable institutions. Actors’ Equity also has certain requirements. Hence, societies do sometimes issue contracts to performers who gravitate between the amateur and professional arenas. Auckland Music Theatre, in common with other societies, now posts audition notices on its website stating that performers will not be paid. Ian Gardiner made an interesting comment: “Theatre will always have a future, but will always be hand to mouth. That’s part of what theatre is, albeit professional or amateur”.

**The Repertoire**

Auckland Music Theatre has endeavoured to follow contemporary trends in musical theatre. This is evident from its ever-changing repertoire that has evolved from the romantic, operetta-style musical to the jagged rhythms and concept musicals of Sondheim’s *Company* and *Assassins*, as well as the Australian musical *The Boy from Oz*. The society also revamps older musicals to meet contemporary demands. For instance,

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Where’s Charley? (1986) was a return to a slightly earlier period of musical. While period dress was used, tap dancing was added in an effort to update the production.\textsuperscript{733}

During the first ninety years of its lifespan, Auckland Music Theatre presented no fewer than 180 productions. Musicals have been the mainstay of the repertoire, but the society has also staged ballets, concerts, plays and revues in an effort to keep up to date and widen its sphere of influence. The minutes and annual reports do not always state why a particular production was chosen. Nevertheless, where written evidence is available, it appears that shows are chosen for their perceived financial viability. To a large extent, however, the repertoire of Auckland Music Theatre has been dictated by the copyright holders. There has been little change in this regard from the era of Williamson’s to the present day where Hal Leonard, Tams-Witmark, Cameron Mackintosh and Disney, amongst others, dominate. In Auckland (and New Zealand), nonetheless, amateur theatre is a much larger sector than is the professional. Therefore, copyright holders have permitted societies to perform musicals which have not been available to amateurs in other parts of the world, including England and America.

Initially, Auckland Music Theatre staged British musicals, commencing with The Gondoliers in 1919. The first American musical, The Belle of New York, was produced in 1928. Over the decades, there has been a sharp rise in the number of American musicals produced by the society, and a decline in the number of British musicals. This follows the trends of both Broadway and the West End. To a large extent this is due to the marketing skills of the American entrepreneurs. As many of the interviewees pointed out, the marketing for American musicals has been completed by the promoters and professionals well before copyright is granted to amateurs. If one mounts a New Zealand musical, for example, the marketing has rarely been done. However, as the interviewees stated, it is difficult nowadays to tell the difference between British and American musicals, particularly with the advent of the megamusical.

In spite of the prolific output of the British composer, Andrew Lloyd Webber, the popularity of American musicals shows no sign of abating. Nevertheless, both Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh do collaborate with American entrepreneurs. For instance, the professional production of Mary Poppins, which is currently circling the globe and soon to be staged in Auckland, is being promoted by both Disney and Mackintosh as coproducers.

\textsuperscript{733} Personal interview with Ian Gardiner, 19 January 2008.
In the course of its history, the society has produced five different New Zealand musicals one of which, *Tutankhamen*, was staged three times: 1923, 1924 and 1930. This is considered one of the most successful musicals ever produced by the society. A second New Zealand musical, *The Abbess of Whitby* (1925), was not a success, as audiences found the subject matter disturbing. *Dick Whittington* (1946) is one of the few pantomimes the society has staged. (The scripts and scores of all three musicals have been lost.) Decades later, two more New Zealand musicals were produced: *Love Off The Shelf* (1994) and *Making it Big* (1995). The former was a success financially but the latter was not. Interviewees commented that it was possible to include some local New Zealand content nowadays in the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan as copyright had expired.\(^{734}\) Copyright holders, however, have strict guidelines with regard to the presentation of their shows.\(^{735}\)

From time to time, however, the society does experiment with new musicals in smaller venues in order to broaden its repertoire and gain new audiences. As Brian O’Connor, a director and performer of note in Auckland stated: “New shows tend to attract new singers and new actors”.\(^{736}\) *The Biograph Girl* (1986) was a case in point. Many new performers auditioned and the show proved a success financially.

However, more than one interviewee observed that at times a production which is a personal favourite of a committee member is mounted, and that this is not always in the best interests of the society.\(^{737}\) For example, performers on the committee tend to choose shows in which they can play a role. Thus, the same people are cast in the leading roles, which can have a detrimental effect on audience numbers. Interviewees considered that audiences preferred a variety of faces on stage from show to show, rather than viewing the same performers. The Auckland Music Theatre committee has attempted to deal with this at various times. For instance, in 1974 the chairman decreed that if committee members wished to audition for a musical that the society was staging, they would need to stand down from the committee for the duration of the show.

Reasons for the financial success or failure of productions are not necessarily predictable. Several interviewees commented that they would be multimillionaires if they could identify the magic formula which would guarantee financial success in showbusiness. As Robert Alderton stated: “It really comes back to programming as

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\(^{734}\) A recent high school production of *The Mikado* adapted the musical to their school setting. For instance, the character of Nanki-Poo became the head boy of the school.

\(^{735}\) Personal interview with Ian Gardiner, 19 January 2008.

\(^{736}\) Personal interview with Brian O’Connor, 15 May 2007.

\(^{737}\) It is noteworthy that other societies have the same conflict-of-interest problem.
intellectually and unemotionally as you can and hoping for the best”.

Such is the unpredictability of showbusiness.

As discussed in chapter nine, it is not possible always to gauge the mood of the general public. Both Fiddler on the Roof and The Wizard of Oz (1993) resulted in huge financial losses, although the society had been certain that the musicals would be successful. In the case of The Great Waltz (1979) and Song of Norway (1983), both are old-fashioned shows, but the former was a success while the latter was a failure. Song of Norway was staged to cater for the wave of nostalgia that was sweeping the nation, as discussed in chapter eight. One could argue that the music of Grieg is less appealing than that of Strauss, but it is a matter of opinion. When Theatre Arts staged a three-week season of Song of Norway (1964), starring Patricia Morison, the production was a great success. Granted, it was another time and another place.

The Auckland Music Theatre production of Ragtime (2007) in concert included a large, experienced cast and sizeable orchestra, but the society did not expect the level of success it achieved. Several committee members had been keen to stage Ragtime as the music appealed, but, as the musical was not well known in Auckland, the society had budgeted for a loss. This is an example of a decision that was based on emotion rather than logic. Fortunately, Ragtime was a success.

It is important to note, however, that professional musicals are not always successful. For instance, in 2009 The Edge imported the Australian Opera production of My Fair Lady, which was staged in the Civic Theatre in Auckland (New Zealand Herald, 27 May 2009). Ticket sales were poor, and a week prior to opening night it was evident that the season would result in a loss. Rather than lose face by cancelling the production, Auckland Council agreed to “bail out” the musical by subsidising it by $1.4 million (New Zealand Herald, 27 May 2009). My Fair Lady closed after only nineteen performances and lost $1.9 million. Council blamed the difficult economic times for the loss. It claimed that its financial team had correctly assessed the commercial risk from all aspects prior to importing the production.

Nevertheless, it is the amateur practitioners in Auckland who have developed musical theatre. Auckland Music Theatre has provided a training platform for many amateur performers who have eventually become stars on the international stage. Despite the considerable input into the cultural daily life of Auckland, however, the ordinary

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739 The Civic is under the umbrella of The Edge, the entertainment branch of Auckland Council.
740 It is not unusual for overseas musicals to run for two to three months in Auckland, because the productions are sometimes not toured to other New Zealand centres. Rather, audiences travel to Auckland.
people who participate in amateur musical theatre lack visibility. As Ruth Finnegan points out, their contribution to society is taken for granted by the general public, and largely ignored by scholars. Along similar lines John Lowerson observed, “amateur operatics has enjoyed an occasional non-singing, walk-on part in wider studies of cultural and leisure provision for far too long”. This microhistory has attempted to redress this imbalance.

Reflections and Future Directions

The aim of this microhistory was to show how a small community of ordinary people known as Auckland Music Theatre Inc. successfully adapted to change in musical theatre in the largest city in New Zealand. It has been a long journey. During the course of research, I realised that it was impossible to include all the information that I had collected: in retrospect, it may have proved more effective to study a shorter timeframe and incorporate some case studies by comparing the three productions of *The Belle of New York*, for instance. This would have provided more in-depth data. Nevertheless, as very limited research has been carried out on musical theatre in Auckland and New Zealand, many avenues remain to be explored.

The choice of repertoire in relation to the West End and Broadway, copyright constraints and financial considerations have formed an integral part of this thesis. Reasons for the success or failure of various shows have also been a continuing theme. While I have provided a summary of my findings in the preceding section “The Repertoire”, there is scope for further analysis. One could explore in more depth whether there were any common factors linking the success or failure of certain productions. Some of the conclusions I have reached in the section under “Survival Strategies” earlier in this chapter could also assist in the research.

It would be of interest also to undertake a musical and dramaturgical analysis of two New Zealand musicals by Roger Hall, *Love Off the Shelf* and *Making it Big*, as a comparison with one British and one American musical to demonstrate how much, or little, influence has been wielded by overseas sources. Both of Hall’s productions are satires, but *Love Off the Shelf* deals with the universal theme of love as portrayed in the novels of Mills and Boon while *Making it Big* has a local theme, albeit with an excursion to America.

The New Zealand musical, too, merits more attention. Peter Harcourt’s book *Fantasy and Folly* discusses the history of the New Zealand musical from 1880 to 1940.

There is an opportunity, therefore, to continue the history from 1941 to the present day. This could offer an insight as to why the New Zealand musical has not managed to make headway against its overseas rivals.

A comparison of the history of the longest-surviving society in each of the main centres of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin might provide some interesting information. From an Aucklandier's perspective, Dunedin is the Scottish city, Christchurch is the home of the English gentry, Wellington is the self-styled city of the arts (and the seat of government) and Auckland is the largest Polynesian city in the world. Amateur musical theatre societies throughout New Zealand offer similar repertoires, which is due to a range of factors. All the same, there are significant differences.

While a history of musical theatre in New Zealand embracing all amateur societies would be significant, much time and finance would be required. Musical Theatre New Zealand did consider writing such a history in the 1970s, but decided that the size of the project would be unmanageable. Therefore, it abandoned the idea and suggested that individual societies write their own histories. As many societies have undertaken such a project, a platform does exist for further study.

A comparison of the structure and repertoire of New Zealand amateur music theatre societies in the larger centres with those in Australia could also be of interest. On the surface it appears that the two countries have much in common. However, Australia is a vast continent made up of six states and two mainland territories, with a population of 22.6 million. This is in deep contrast to the small population and territory of New Zealand. Many New Zealanders migrate to Australia as there are more opportunities to perform in professional theatre. Moreover, many of the copyright holders are domiciled in Sydney and Melbourne.

During the course of this research, I was intrigued by the history of the Auckland Amateur Opera Club, the more so because it was necessary to reconstruct it from local newspapers. The opera club deserves a more in-depth study than either time or space permitted in this microhistory. Comparing its activities with some of the older societies in New Zealand, such as those at Blenheim, Wanganui, Gisborne and Napier could prove fruitful.

Coda

All in all, musical theatre is a fascinating medium that has contributed greatly to the cultural life of Auckland. Indeed, elements of community identity have been nurtured
through an increasingly characteristic repertoire of “adopted children” (including European operetta, the British musical and the American musical), which has helped an emerging society to discover and celebrate itself.

As early as 1947 a potted history in a newsletter, entitled “On Both Sides of the Curtain”, highlighted the role of the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society, now Auckland Music Theatre, in an evolving urban context:

With the expansion of Auckland during the past 10 years, and with the very definite prospect of a considerable expansion in the next 10 years, it is vital that this society should not only encourage the theatrical talent of Auckland people, but that it should have the facilities, the organisation, and the means by which it may be developed, trained and given actual stage experience... It is a labour of love, willingly given as a contribution to the cultural development, and life, of this city.

As Larry Stempel observed: “Culturally speaking musicals matter. How they matter and to whom may change”.\textsuperscript{742} The history of Auckland Music Theatre, with its evolving repertoire and the input of succeeding generations of members, confirms this observation.

\textsuperscript{742} Stempel, \textit{Showtime}, 13.
Appendix 1

Map of New Zealand showing Zones as allocated by Musical Theatre New Zealand

Zone 1
Northland
Auckland

Zone 2
Waikato
Coromandel
Bay of Plenty
East Coast

Zone 3
Taranaki
Hawkes Bay
Manawatu
Wairarapa
Wellington

Zone 4
Marlborough
Nelson
West Coast
Canterbury

Zone 5
Otago
Fiordland
Southland

sources: the map is a compilation from various atlases, internet sites and freehand drawing by the author

Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin are the five most-populated cities in New Zealand. The much smaller towns of Kerikeri and Invercargill are, respectively, the northernmost and southernmost centres with musical societies that are members of MTNZ.
Appendix 2

Location of Musical Theatre Societies in the Auckland Region as at 2009

Legend

3. Pilgrim Productions Inc., founded in 1978
5. Playhouse Theatre Inc., (1972): an amalgamation of Auckland Children’s Light Opera, est. 1962; St Thomas Light Opera Club, est. 1963; and Henderson Festival Players/Western Players, est. 1966
6. Harlequin Musical Theatre Inc., founded as the Howick Light Opera Group in 1959
7. Manukau Performing Arts Inc., founded as the Papatoetoe Music Club in 1954
8. Papakura Theatre Company Inc., founded as the Papakura Drama Club in 1954
9. Pukekohe Light Opera Club Inc., founded as a choral evening class at Pukekohe High School in 1969, and officially incorporated as a society in 1972

84.6 km from 1 to 9
(approx. 90 minutes’ drive by car)
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

TO: ALL INTERVIEWEES

Working Title of Project: The Influence of the British and American Musical on Musical Theatre Performance in Greater Auckland from 1909 to 2009.

I, Julie Jackson Tretchikoff, am a student undertaking a three-year Ph.D. in Music under the supervision of Professor Heath Lees and Dr David Lines of the School of Music, The University of Auckland. The duration of the project is from 1 March 2007 to 28 February 2010. At the end of this time, if all goes according to plan, a thesis will be published. I invite you to take part in this project.

The study includes a survey and evaluation of the importance of Musical Theatre as a vehicle for transmitting cultural ideas, broadening understanding and raising community awareness in Greater Auckland, taking into account its setting within the context of New Zealand, from 1906 to 2006. As the Auckland Music Theatre Inc., is the longest-established musical company in Greater Auckland, their archives will be the basis for some part of this project.

You have been chosen to participate in this research because of your long association with, and contribution to, Musical Theatre. Your participation is voluntary and it is your decision as to whether you wish to take part. You may withdraw at any time, and I will honour your decision. Likewise, if you do not wish to have your interview audiotaped, I will honour your decision. If you desire name suppression, a pseudonym will be used throughout this research, my thesis and any associated work at any stage.

It may be that the information acquired during the course of the interview will be used not only for my thesis but also for seminars, workshops, conferences and publications at a later stage.

If you agree to be interviewed, you will be asked to sign a Consent Form. The interview will last for approximately one hour, at a time and venue of your choosing. A list of questions is attached. If you agree, your interview will be recorded on audiotapes, and then transcribed. The recorder may be turned off at any time at your request.

A printed copy of your interview will be sent to you prior to publication in the thesis. If you wish to make any amendments or to withdraw from the research, your decision will be honoured. No reason for withdrawal is necessary and information you have contributed will not be used. If you desire, a copy of the interview tape will be sent to you.

As is required by Statute, the Consent Form will be stored in a locked cabinet in the School of Music, The University of Auckland, for six years after your interview. The interview tapes will be stored in my home in a secure place, for six years.

Researcher: Julie Jackson Tretchikoff, Ph.D. Candidate. Tel. (09) 478 0935. email: tretchikoff@xtra.co.nz

Supervisor: Professor H. Lees, School of Music, The University of Auckland, 6 Symonds Street, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Tel: 3737599 extn 87704.

Supervisor: Dr D. Lines, School of Music, The University of Auckland, 6 Symonds Street, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Tel: 3737599 extn 84881.

Head of Music: Professor R. Constable, School of Music, The University of Auckland, 6 Symonds Street, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Tel: 3737599, extn 82071.

For Ethical concerns contact: The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Room 005 Alfred Nathan House, 24 Princes Street, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Tel: 3737599 extn. 87830.

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

(This Form will be held for a period of six years)

Working Title of Project: The Influence of the British and American Musical on Musical Theatre Performance in Greater Auckland from 1909 to 2009.

Name of Participant: _______________________________________________________

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood it and am prepared to take part in the research. I have had the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher, Julie Jackson Tretchikoff, and have had them answered.

I agree/do not agree to be audiotaped.

I am willing for my name to be used for the purposes of this interview and the research.

OR

I wish to have my name suppressed and that a pseudonym is used.

I understand that:

• I may withdraw at any time if I so wish and my decision will be honoured by the researcher.

• Giving an interview for the purposes of this research project is voluntary.

• I will receive a printed copy of my interview prior to the publication of this research project. Should I wish to make amendments, or to withdraw from the project, my decision will be honoured. No reason for withdrawal is necessary and information I have contributed will not be used.

• A copy of my interview tape will be sent to me for historical purposes, if I so desire.

• As required by Statute, my Consent Form will be stored in the School of Music, The University of Auckland, in a secure place for six years.

• My interview tape will be stored in a secure place in the home of the researcher for six years.

• There may be a significant delay between my participation in the study and the publication of this research project.

• During the course of this research project, and after its completion, the information may be used for seminars, conferences, workshops and publications.

I __________________________________________________________________________

consent to an interview for the purposes of this research project.

Participant’s signature: ____________________________________________________ Date: ________________ 

Researcher: Julie Jackson Tretchikoff, Ph.D. Candidate 
Tel. (09) 478 0935 email: tretchikoff@xtra.co.nz

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 
Appendix 5

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWEES

1. Please state your name.
2. In which year did your ‘theatrical career’ commence and in which capacity, for example, performer, director, musical director, committee member, etc.
3. Have you been associated with any particular musical or theatrical society over the years or have you moved around?
4. If you have been associated over a lengthy period with any one society, is there any particular reason?
5. Based on your experience and perception, why do you think the fortunes of various societies have fluctuated? (For example, declining population in some areas such as the inner city.)
6. In the past, some societies have imported ‘stars’ from overseas. Do you think this has attracted larger audiences and, consequently, helped the box office takings?
7. Based on your experience, do you think that New Zealanders sometimes under-estimate their talents? If so, why?
8. Based on your experience, do ‘bad’ reviews actually influence audiences not to attend particular productions, or do you think the lack of attendance is due more to the show which has been staged and which may not have a great deal of appeal.
9. Do you think that New Zealand audiences prefer familiar shows to new ventures?
10. In comparing the shows which are being staged today with those which were staged 40 years ago, what changes do you see? (Performance, technical, etc.)
11. In comparing the shows which are being staged today with those which were staged 30 years ago, what changes do you see?
12. In comparing the shows which are being staged today with those which were staged 20 years ago, what changes do you see?
13. In comparing the shows which are being staged today with those which were staged 10 years ago, what changes do you see?
14. Do you think the performance standards are higher, lower or about the same today as they were say 20 years ago?
15. Do you have a preference for British Musicals rather than American Musicals or vice versa in terms of effect, audience/performer satisfaction and so on? If so, why?
16. Do you think that musical theatre companies should perform more shows which are written by local people and which reflect our heritage?
17. Do you think that musical theatre companies should perform opera, for example?
18. What is your favourite show and why?
19. You have undertaken a range of responsibilities within musical theatre (for example, director and/or performer, musical director, lighting and so on). What is your favourite task and why?
20. Generally, theatre venues are becoming smaller. Why do you think that is happening?

Researcher: Julie Jackson Tretchikoff, Ph.D. Candidate
Tel. (09) 478 0935  email: tretchikoff@xtra.co.nz

Appendix 6

Musicals and Plays presented by Auckland Music Theatre from 1919 to 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Lyricist</th>
<th>Author and/or Playwright</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbess of Whitby</td>
<td>Eric Waters</td>
<td>Leonard P. Leary</td>
<td>Unknown *744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice in Wonderland (pantomime)</td>
<td>Richard Addinsell, John Ritchie</td>
<td>Eva le Gallienne, Florida Friebus</td>
<td>Lewis Carroll</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amahl and the Night Visitors</td>
<td>Gian-Carlo Menotti</td>
<td>Gian-Carlo Menotti</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>And So To Bed</td>
<td>Vivian Ellis</td>
<td>Vivian Ellis</td>
<td>Based on a play by J.B. Fagan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>Charles Strouse</td>
<td>Martin Charnin</td>
<td>Written by Thomas Meehan and based on the Little Orphan Annie comic strip by Harold Gray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arcadians, The</td>
<td>Lionel Monkton</td>
<td>Howard Talbot</td>
<td>Marc Ambient A.M. Thompson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Archy and Mehitabel</td>
<td>George Kleinsinger</td>
<td>Joe Darion</td>
<td>Adapted by Joe Darion and Mel Brooks from the stories of Don Marquis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assassins</td>
<td>Stephen Sondheim</td>
<td>Stephen Sondheim</td>
<td>John Weidman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babes in Arms</td>
<td>Richard Rodgers</td>
<td>Lorenz Hart</td>
<td>Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartered Bride, The</td>
<td>Bedrich Smetana</td>
<td>Karel Sabina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beggar’s Opera, The</td>
<td>Musical arrangements by Frederick Austin</td>
<td>John Gay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belle of New York, The</td>
<td>Gustave Keker</td>
<td>Hugh Morton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, The</td>
<td>Carol Hall</td>
<td>Carol Hall</td>
<td>Larry L. King and Peter Masterson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beautiful Thing (play)</td>
<td>Carol Hall</td>
<td>Carol Hall</td>
<td>Jonathan Harvey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Big River</td>
<td>Roger Miller</td>
<td>Roger Miller</td>
<td>Adapted by William Hauptman from The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biograph Girl, The</td>
<td>David Heneker</td>
<td>Warner Brown</td>
<td>Warner Brown</td>
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<td>Boy from Oz, The</td>
<td>Peter Allen et al</td>
<td>Peter Allen et al</td>
<td>Nick Enright Martin Sherman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boyfriend, The</td>
<td>Sandy Wilson</td>
<td>Sandy Wilson</td>
<td>Sandy Wilson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bugsy Malone</td>
<td>Paul Williams</td>
<td>Paul Williams Alan Parker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cabaret</td>
<td>John Kander</td>
<td>Fred Ebb</td>
<td>Book by Joe Masteroff and based on a play by John Van Druten and the stories of Christopher Isherwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calamity Jane</td>
<td>Sammy Fain</td>
<td>Paul Webster</td>
<td>Adapted by Ronald Hamner and Phil Park from a stage play by Charles K. Freeman after Calamity Jane, the 1953 Warner Bros film written by James O’Hanlon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Call Me Madam</td>
<td>Irving Berlin</td>
<td>Irving Berlin</td>
<td>Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse</td>
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</table>

*743 The information in this table was drawn almost exclusively from the programmes of Auckland Music Theatre, courtesy Auckland Musical Arts Trust. Supplementary details from other sources have been fully acknowledged in the footnotes and bibliography. Revues, concerts and ballets have not been included in this table because it is difficult to provide accurate details in regard to the content. For example, the Music Hall (1997) programme lists the names of the performers but not the items presented. The only clue to the content is a printed sing-a-long sheet with the words to a small number of songs such as “Hello, Hello”.

*744 As the script, music and programme were lost, the text on which Leary and Waters based their musical is not known. However, the biography of the Abbess may be read in The Ecclesiastical History of the English by Venerable Bede.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Lyricist</th>
<th>Author and/or Playwright</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can Can</td>
<td>Cole Porter</td>
<td>Cole Porter</td>
<td>Abe Burrows</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canterbury Tales, The</td>
<td>Richard Hill</td>
<td>Nevill Coghill</td>
<td>Adapted by Martin Starkie and Nevill Coghill from Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer</td>
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<td></td>
<td>John Hawkins</td>
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<td>Carmen</td>
<td>Georges Bizet</td>
<td>Henry Meilhac</td>
<td>Based on Carmen by Prosper Mérimée</td>
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<td>Ludovic Halevy</td>
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<td>Carnival</td>
<td>Bob Merrill</td>
<td>Bob Merrill</td>
<td>Adapted by Michael Stewart from the story by Paul Gallico and the screenplay for Lili by Helen Deutsch</td>
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<td>Carousel</td>
<td>Richard Rodgers</td>
<td>Oscar Hammerstein II</td>
<td>Adapted by Benjamin F. Glazer from Liliom by Ferenc Molnar</td>
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<td>Chicago</td>
<td>John Kander</td>
<td>Fred Ebb</td>
<td>Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse and based on the play Chicago by Maurine Dallas Watkins</td>
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<td>Christmas Carol, A</td>
<td>Alan Menken</td>
<td>Lynn Ahrens</td>
<td>Adapted by Lynn Ahrens and Mike Ockrent from A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens</td>
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<td>Chu Chin Chow</td>
<td>Frederic Norton</td>
<td>Oscar Asche</td>
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<td>Country Girl, A</td>
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<td>James T. Tanner</td>
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<td>Paul L. Rubens</td>
<td>Percy Greenbank</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cowardy Custard</td>
<td>Noel Coward</td>
<td>Noel Coward</td>
<td>Devised by Gerald Frow, Alan Strachan and Wendy Toye</td>
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<td>Wendy Toye</td>
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<td>Dear Miss Phoebe</td>
<td>Harry Parr Davies</td>
<td>Christopher Hassall</td>
<td>Emilie Littler’s play based on Quality Street by Sir James Barrie</td>
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<td>Dick Whittington (pantomime)</td>
<td>Leo Pilcher</td>
<td>Leo Pilcher</td>
<td>Written by Leo Pilcher and based on the fairytale Dick Whittington</td>
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<td>Evita</td>
<td>Andrew Lloyd Webber</td>
<td>Tim Rice</td>
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<td>Fantasticks, The</td>
<td>Harvey Schmidt</td>
<td>Tom Jones</td>
<td>Adapted by Tom Jones from the play Les Romanesques by Edmund Rostand</td>
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<td>Fiddler on the Roof</td>
<td>Jerry Bock</td>
<td>Sheldon Harnick</td>
<td>Adapted by Joseph Stein from the stories of Sholom Aleichem</td>
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<td>Finian’s Rainbow</td>
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<td>E. Y. Harburg</td>
<td>E. Y. Harburg</td>
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<td>Florodora</td>
<td>Leslie Stuart</td>
<td>Ernest Boyd-Jones</td>
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<td>Paul Rubens</td>
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<td>Follies</td>
<td>Stephen Sondheim</td>
<td>Stephen Sondheim</td>
<td>James Goldman</td>
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<td>Full Monty, The</td>
<td>David Yazbek</td>
<td>David Yazbek</td>
<td>Terrance McNally</td>
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<td>Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, A</td>
<td>Stephen Sondheim</td>
<td>Stephen Sondheim</td>
<td>Adapted by Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart from the plays of Plautus</td>
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<td>Geisha, The</td>
<td>Sidney Jones</td>
<td>Harry Greenbank</td>
<td>Owen Hall</td>
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<td>Lionel Monckton</td>
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<td>Godspell</td>
<td>Stephen Schwartz</td>
<td>Stephen Schwartz</td>
<td>Based on the Gospel according to St Matthew</td>
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<td>Gondoliers, The</td>
<td>Arthur Sullivan</td>
<td>W. S. Gilbert</td>
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<td>Good Night, Vienna</td>
<td>Geo. Posford</td>
<td>Eric Maschwitz</td>
<td>Eric Maschwitz</td>
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</table>

745 The Cowardy Custard (1982) programme states that the production is “an entertainment devised by Gerald Frow, Alan Strachan and Wendy Toye, featuring the words and music of Noel Coward”.

746 The Dear Miss Phoebe (1953) programme states that the musical was presented “by permission of Emile Littler”.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Lyricist</th>
<th>Author and/or Playwright</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Great Waltz, The</strong></td>
<td>Adapted by Robert Wright, George Forrest and Erich Wolfgang Korngold from the music of Johann Strauss I and Johann Strauss II</td>
<td>Robert Wright George Forrest Forman Brown</td>
<td>Adapted by Jerome Chodoron from the original by Moss Hart and Milton Lazarus</td>
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<td><strong>Greek Slave, A</strong></td>
<td>Sidney Jones Lionel Monckton</td>
<td>Harry Greenbank Adrian Ross</td>
<td>Owen Hall</td>
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<td><strong>Guys and Dolls</strong></td>
<td>Frank Loesser</td>
<td>Frank Loesser</td>
<td>Jo Swerling Abe Burrows</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hair</strong></td>
<td>Galt MacDermot</td>
<td>Gerome Ragni James Rado</td>
<td>Gerome Ragni James Rado</td>
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<td><strong>Hans Christian Andersen</strong></td>
<td>Frank Loesser</td>
<td>Frank Loesser</td>
<td>Based on the Samuel Goldwyn movie <em>Hans Christian Andersen</em> and adapted by John Fearnley, Beverley Cross and Tommy Steele</td>
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<td><strong>Hello Dolly!</strong></td>
<td>Jerry Herman</td>
<td>Jerry Herman</td>
<td>Based on <em>The Matchmaker</em> by Thornton Wilder</td>
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<td>Arthur Sullivan</td>
<td>W. S. Gilbert</td>
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<td><strong>Honk!</strong></td>
<td>George Stiles</td>
<td>Anthony Drewe</td>
<td>Adapted by Anthony Drewe from <em>The Ugly Duckling</em> by Hans Christian Andersen</td>
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<td><strong>Hugh, the Drover</strong></td>
<td>R. Vaughan Williams</td>
<td>Harold Child</td>
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<td><strong>I Do! I Do!</strong></td>
<td>Harvey Schmidt</td>
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<td>Adapted by Tom Jones from the <em>Fourposter</em> by Jan de Hartog</td>
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<td>Stephen Sondheim</td>
<td>Stephen Sondheim</td>
<td>James Lapine</td>
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<td><strong>Iolanthe</strong></td>
<td>Arthur Sullivan</td>
<td>W. S. Gilbert</td>
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<td><strong>Irma La Douce</strong></td>
<td>Marguerite Monnot</td>
<td>Alexandre Breffort English lyrics: Julian More David Heneker Monty Norman</td>
<td>Alexandre Breffort English book: Julian More David Heneker Monty Norman</td>
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<td>Ron Pember</td>
<td>Ron Pember Denis De Marne</td>
<td>Ron Pember Denis De Marne</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat</strong></td>
<td>Andrew Lloyd Webber</td>
<td>Tim Rice</td>
<td>Tim Rice</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Katinka</strong></td>
<td>Rudolf Friml</td>
<td>Otto Hauerbach</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>King and I, The</strong></td>
<td>Richard Rodgers</td>
<td>Oscar Hammerstein II</td>
<td>Adapted by Oscar Hammerstein II from <em>Anna and the King of Siam</em> by Margaret London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>King’s Rhapsody</strong></td>
<td>Ivor Novello</td>
<td>Christopher Hassall</td>
<td>Ivor Novello</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Kismet</strong></td>
<td>Robert Wright George Forrest (based on the musical themes of Alexander Borodin)</td>
<td>Robert Wright George Forrest</td>
<td>Adapted by Charles Lederer and Luther Davis from the play <em>Kismet</em> by Edward Knoblock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kiss Me Kate</strong></td>
<td>Cole Porter</td>
<td>Cole Porter</td>
<td>Sam and Bella Spewack; based on <em>The Taming of the Shrew</em> by William Shakespeare⁷⁴⁷⁹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>La Cage aux Folles</strong></td>
<td>Jerry Herman</td>
<td>Jerry Herman</td>
<td>Adapted by Harvey Fierstein based on <em>La Cage aux Folles</em>, a play by Jean Poiret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>La Mascotte</strong></td>
<td>Edmond Audran</td>
<td>Alfred Duru Henri Chivot</td>
<td>English libretto and lyrics by Robert Reece and H. B. Farnie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ladies Night</strong> (play)</td>
<td>Stephen Sinclair</td>
<td>Anthony McCarten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁷⁴⁷⑨ *The Kiss Me Kate* (1999) programme lists these details while the 1971 programme names only Cole Porter in the credits.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Lyricist</th>
<th>Author and/or Playwright</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lend Me a Tenor</strong> (play)</td>
<td>Robert Planquette</td>
<td>Louis Clairville</td>
<td>Ken Ludwig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Les Cloches de Corneville</strong></td>
<td>Louis Gabet</td>
<td>Charles Gabet</td>
<td>Based on a play by Charles Gabet</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Little Shop of Horrors</strong></td>
<td>Alan Menken</td>
<td>Howard Ashman</td>
<td>Adapted by Howard Ashman from the film by Roger Corman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lock Up Your Daughters</strong></td>
<td>Laurie Johnson</td>
<td>Lionel Bart</td>
<td>Adapted by Bernard Miles from <em>Rape upon Rape</em> by Henry Fielding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Love Off The Shelf</strong></td>
<td>Philip Norman</td>
<td>A. K. Grant</td>
<td>Roger Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Making it Big</strong></td>
<td>Philip Norman</td>
<td>Roger Hall</td>
<td>Roger Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Merrie England</strong></td>
<td>Edward German</td>
<td>Basil Hood</td>
<td>Basil Hood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mikado, The</strong></td>
<td>Arthur Sullivan</td>
<td>W. S. Gilbert</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>My Fair Lady</strong></td>
<td>Frederick Loewe</td>
<td>Alan Jay Lerner</td>
<td>Adapted by Alan Jay Lerner from the play <em>Pygmalion</em> by George Bernard Shaw and 1938 motion picture directed by Gabriel Pascal</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Naughty Marietta</strong></td>
<td>Victor Herbert</td>
<td>Rida Johnson Young</td>
<td>Rida Johnson Young</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>New Moon, The</strong></td>
<td>Sigmund Romberg</td>
<td>Oscar Hammerstein II</td>
<td>Based on <em>Green Grow the Lilacs</em> by Lynn Riggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oklahoma!</strong></td>
<td>Richard Rodgers</td>
<td>Oscar Hammerstein II</td>
<td>Adapted by Lionel Bart from <em>Oliver Twist</em> by Charles Dickens</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Oliver!</strong></td>
<td>Lionel Bart</td>
<td>Lionel Bart</td>
<td>Adapted by John Thompson, Marshall Barer and Dean Fuller from <em>The Princess and the Pea</em> by Hans Christian Andersen</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Once Upon a Mattress</strong></td>
<td>Mary Rodgers</td>
<td>Marshall Barer</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Opposite Sex, The</strong> (play)</td>
<td>David Tristram</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Our Miss Gibbs</strong></td>
<td>Ivan Caryll</td>
<td>Adrian Ross</td>
<td>James T. Tanner (“Cryptos”)</td>
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<td><strong>Pajama Game, The</strong></td>
<td>Richard Adler</td>
<td>Richard Adler</td>
<td>George Abbott</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pal Joey</strong></td>
<td>Richard Rodgers</td>
<td>Lorenz Hart</td>
<td>Richard Bissell</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pirates of Penzance, The</strong></td>
<td>Arthur Sullivan</td>
<td>W. S. Gilbert</td>
<td>John O’Hara</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Playbill - two plays:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Browning Version</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Terence Rattigan.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Harlequinade</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Poison Pen</strong> (play)</td>
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<td>Richard Llewelly</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Putting it Together</strong></td>
<td>Stephen Sondheim</td>
<td>Stephen Sondheim</td>
<td>Terence McNally</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>“Ragtime” the Musical in concert</strong></td>
<td>Stephen Flaherty</td>
<td>Lynn Ahrens</td>
<td>Michael Pertwee</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Red, Hot and Cole</strong></td>
<td>Cole Porter</td>
<td>Cole Porter</td>
<td>James Bianchi, Muriel McAuley and Randy Strawdeman</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Robert and Elizabeth</strong></td>
<td>Ron Grainer</td>
<td>Ronald Miller</td>
<td>Adapted by Ronald Miller from an original idea by Fred G. Morritt based on <em>The Barretts of Wimpole Street</em> by Rudolph Besier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rose Marie</strong></td>
<td>Rudolf Friml</td>
<td>Otto Harbach</td>
<td>Otto Harbach</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Runaway Girl, A</strong></td>
<td>Lionel Monckton</td>
<td>Aubrey Hopwood</td>
<td>Oscar Hammerstein II</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ivan Caryll</td>
<td>Harry Greenbank</td>
<td>Harry Nichols</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Salad Days</strong></td>
<td>Julian Slade</td>
<td>Dorothy Reynolds</td>
<td>Dorothy Reynolds</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Julian Slade</td>
<td>Julian Slade</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sally</strong></td>
<td>Jerome Kern</td>
<td>Guy Bolton</td>
<td>Guy Bolton</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Clifford Grey</td>
<td>Clifford Grey</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>San Toy</strong></td>
<td>Sidney Jones</td>
<td>Harry Greenbank</td>
<td>Edward Morton</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lionel Monckton</td>
<td>Adrian Ross</td>
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<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>Composer</td>
<td>Lyricist</td>
<td>Author and/or Playwright</td>
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<td>---------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secret Garden, The</td>
<td>Lucy Simon</td>
<td>Marsha Norman</td>
<td>Adapted by Marsha Norman from the novel of the same name by Frances Hodgson Burnett</td>
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<tr>
<td>70, Girls, 70</td>
<td>John Kander</td>
<td>Fred Ebb</td>
<td>Fred Ebb Normal L. Martin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show Boat</td>
<td>Jerome Kern</td>
<td>Oscar Hammerstein II</td>
<td>Adapted by Oscar Hammerstein II from the novel Show Boat by Edna Ferber</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slice of Saturday Night, A</td>
<td>Heather Brothers</td>
<td>Heather Brothers</td>
<td>Heather Brothers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sit Down a Minute, Adrian</td>
<td>Adapted by Robert Wright and George Forrest from the music of Edward Grieg</td>
<td>Robert Wright George Forrest</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Pacific</td>
<td>Richard Rodgers</td>
<td>Oscar Hammerstein II</td>
<td>Adapted by Oscar Hammerstein II from Tales of the South Pacific by James M. Michener</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tarantara! Tarantara!</td>
<td>Ian Taylor</td>
<td>Ian Taylor</td>
<td>Written by Ian Taylor using the songs of Gilbert and Sullivan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tutankhamen</td>
<td>Eric Waters</td>
<td>Leonard P. Leary</td>
<td>Leonard P. Leary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Bouquets, The</td>
<td>Approximately twenty uncredited Victorian composers</td>
<td>Eleanor and Herbert Farjeon</td>
<td>Eleanor and Herbert Farjeon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vagabond King, The</td>
<td>Rudolf Friml</td>
<td>W.H. Post</td>
<td>W.H. Post Brian Hooker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victor Victoria</td>
<td>Henry Mancini</td>
<td>Leslie Bricusse</td>
<td>Adapted by Blake Edwards from the motion picture owned and distributed by Turner Entertainment</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Side Story</td>
<td>Leonard Bernstein</td>
<td>Stephen Sondheim</td>
<td>Arthur Laurents based on a concept of Jerome Robbins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where’s Charley?</td>
<td>Frank Loesser</td>
<td>Frank Loesser</td>
<td>Adapted from the play Charlie’s Aunt by Brandon Thomas based on the book by George Abbott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Horse Inn</td>
<td>Ralph Benatsky</td>
<td>Original lyrics: Robert Gilbert English lyrics: Harry Graham</td>
<td>Adapted by Hans Muller and Erik Charell from a play by Oscar Blumenthal and Gustav Kadelburg and adapted for amateur operatic societies by Eric Maschwitz and Bernard Grun</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wizard of Oz, The</td>
<td>Music and lyrics based on the MGM motion picture score by Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harbury with background music by Herbert Stothart.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adapted by John Kane from the motion picture screenplay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zorba</td>
<td>John Kander</td>
<td>Fred Ebb</td>
<td>Adapted by Joseph Stein from Zorba the Greek by Nikos Kazantzakis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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  Rodney and Waitemata Times  
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  *The New-Zealander*  
  New Zealand Sporting and Dramatic Review  
  New Zealand Observer and Free Lance  
  *The Southern Cross*

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Auckland Music Theatre Inc. Minutes, Annual Reports and Financial Accounts

Minutes of Meetings

Annual Reports

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Discography


