

NEW ZEALAND OPERA SCHOOL IMPACT REPORT 2026

NEW
ZEALAND
OPERA
SCHOOL



NZOS 2026 SNAPSHOT

FROM OUR FOUNDER DONALD TROTT



The 2026 New Zealand Opera School delivered a strong, future-focused programme with international tutors Mary Plazas from the Royal Northern College of Music (UK), Glenn Winslade (Australia), Nikki Li Hartliep (US and NZ) and Sharolyn Kimmorley (Australia).

More than 60 young singers auditioned for 21 places and were selected by an independent panel. The student cohort for 2026 were particularly strong in terms of potential and talent and worked cohesively as a group with great determination and tenacity.

The music faculty worked tirelessly to support the students and included leading New Zealand pianists, Director of Languages Dr. Luca Manghi, and Stagecraft Director Jacqueline Coats.

Seven public events marked the School's 32nd year, culminating in a gala performance at the Royal Whanganui Opera House. Events were well attended and delivered in conjunction with the voluntary Whanganui Opera Week Committee, strengthening local sponsorship relationships, and repeating a highly successful free performance in the Sarjeant Gallery foyer featuring alumnus Stephen Diaz.

This initiative continues to broaden community access and attract new audiences to opera.

Early ticket release in September 2025 and a four-month regional marketing campaign successfully broadened audience reach and generated strong ticket sales despite a 5% decline in the support of the arts nationally.

Our expanded digital strategy continued into 2026. Working with Whanganui Technical Services, the School increased video and photography output and continued livestreaming major events. Nearly 60,000 unique viewers engaged with the streams globally, reinforcing Whanganui Opera Week's international visibility. Social media growth remained strong, with Facebook reaching 255,000 unique accounts and achieving world-class engagement rates.

Regional promotion across print, radio and local outlets supported strong attendance, while an expanded volunteer group enhanced event delivery and daily support for students and tutors.

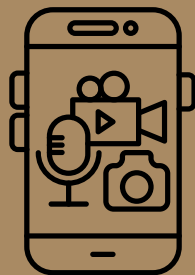
Donald Trott CNZM, JP



45 PARTICIPANTS
INCLUDING 22 STUDENTS



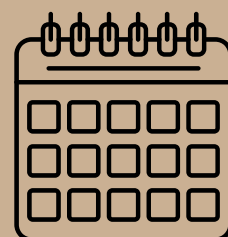
EST. 25,000
PEOPLE ENGAGED



550,000+ DIGITAL REACH
180 PIECES OF CONTENT SHARED
10,000 VIEWS OF LIVE
PERFORMANCES



1,330 TICKETS SOLD
150 ATTENDING FREE EVENTS



7 PUBLIC EVENTS
AT 6 DIFFERENT VENUES

NZOS 2026 TUTORS

We were delighted to welcome Mary Plazas from the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester to the School in 2026. A connection with an institution of this kind is so helpful to our students as they look to pursue their studies overseas.

We also benefitted from the expert tuition of vocal technician and coach Glenn Winslade (Australia), Nikki Li Hartliep (US/NZ) and Sharolyn Kimmorley AM (Australia).

With support from our experienced Music Faculty including Dr. Luca Manghi as Director of Languages and Jacqueline Coats as Stagecraft Director, we were able to support the students in the critical areas of language and acting.

Jacqui encourages the students to engage with their emotions and enrich their performances on stage and was assisted this year by Robert Tucker.

Dr. Pauline Hiroti worked with the cohort as choreographer and fitness co-ordinator. Pauline incorporated Māori ora practices into daily school life, enhancing wellbeing, emotional regulation and connection across the student community.

The School welcomed returning alumni Stephen Diaz to the School who shared his experience of studying and working overseas. In addition Filipe Manu answered questions and shared his journey during an online session with the students.

Lee Williams was appointed as Production Design for GOM 2026, co-ordinating the set with Production Manager Fergus Reid and preparing props and costumes for the final show. Lee is an internationally renowned designer and costumier based in Whanganui.



THE STUDENTS

60 singers submitted applications for the 2026 NZ Opera School. Students were selected by an Independent Selection Panel and then interviewed by the team to ensure their readiness for the programme intensity. It is a hallmark of the School that we provide access to the best vocal tutors from around the world to help extend the students learning and vocal developments.

50% of students were from Māori, Pasifika or Asian heritage reflecting our passion in supporting talent and diversity from across Aotearoa.

11 returning and 10 new students were welcomed to the NZ Opera School in 2026. The students were supportive and encouraging of each other and worked well to achieve their goals. We implemented a buddy system where returning students supporting new students during the fortnight. This worked well to develop relationships and to encourage leadership from the older students. The cohort showed immense dedication to their studies and the vocal tutors were impressed with the progress they made during the School.

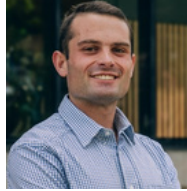
Baritones

Arana Ashby
Blake Scanlen
Fa'amamu Fonoti-Fuimaono
Tomairangi Henare



Tenors

Bayley Goldstone
Ivan Zhang
Taliai Fifita
Tom Varney



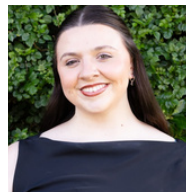
Counter Tenor

Jack Doyle



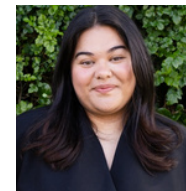
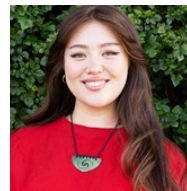
Mezzo Sopranos

Cadence Chung
Charlotte Secker
Grace Burt



Sopranos

Caitlin Roberts
Emma Jones
Erin Connelly-Whyte
Jasmine Jessen
Millie Trusttum
Niamh Bentley
Sarah Mileham
Shana Matthews
Tia Katipo



NZOS 2026 AWARDS

As selected by our international vocal tutors, director of languages and stagecraft director, we are delighted to confirm the following award winners at the 2026 New Zealand Opera School:



Jack Doyle
Counter Tenor

Dame Malvina Major
Foundation Award (\$7,500)



Sarah Mileham
Soprano

Dame Sister Mary
Leo Award (\$3,000)



Jasmine Jessen
Soprano

Merle Higgie Opera
Prize for Potential (\$3,000)



Arana Ashby
Baritone

Donald Trott Scholarship
(2027 place)



Taliai Fifita
Tenor

Donald Trott Scholarship
(2027 place)



Niamh Bentley
Soprano

Spirit of the School
(\$500 & Glass Trophy)

The **Dame Malvina Major Foundation Award** is the most prestigious award at NZOS and is awarded based on vocal ability, acting capabilities, languages, plans for the future and general presentation.

The **Dame Sister Mary Leo Foundation Award** is presented to a runner up of the Dame Malvina Major Foundation Scholarship Award. As a tutor of Dame Malvina Major, the Dame Sister Mary Leo Award is a special award given each year at NZOS.

The **Merle Higgie Opera Prize for Potential** was established by Janis Higgie, daughter of the late Merle Higgie who was an avid supporter of the work of NZOS. This award is given to the student showing the most promise during the fortnight residential course.

The **Donald Trott Scholarship** is awarded to the student who the principal tutors believe would most benefit from attending NZOS the following year. The recipient receives a sponsored place at the School to assist with their operatic development.

In memory of the late Capt. Bryan Wyness, former Chair of the NZ Opera School Trust, the **Spirit of the Opera School** prize is presented to the student who, during the course of the School, displays the all-round spirit of hard work, consideration and encouragement of fellow students, as well as a positive attitude at all times. This award is voted for by the staff and students of the School.

NIHIL TUMULTUS, TANTUM OPERA MINIMUM FUSS, MAXIMUM WORK

The NZ Opera School motto, 'minimum fuss, maximum work' encourages students to embrace the intensity of learning provided in this unique, residential School. The more they commit to the process, take on board feedback and advice, the greater their progress.

We received very positive feedback from our student surveys completed after the School where students have the opportunity to reflect on their experience and the impact the School had on their future study plans and career aspirations. Student quotes are shared below. Feedback from both students and staff are considered as part of our annual Strategy Day to assist with planning.

"I felt my experience was pretty hard to top. If I come again I will work just as hard, if not harder, to take as much in as I can. It is such a brilliant school and I felt at home."

"Thanks to everyone who made this such a special experience...this was an unforgettable experience and I can't stop talking about it."

"The School has changed how I view my future plans - I've decided to enrol in Honours at UoA and seriously looking at overseas options after that."

"Being at the school around people who are on a path that I'd like to be on has been really eye opening and has definitely encouraged me to consider further study and the different pathways to study overseas."

"I am very grateful for the support of the opera school and the performance opportunities that have been provided to me over the last year. It has provided a huge amount of learning that I am looking forward to working on more throughout the year."

"My time at the school has given me more confidence in my plans. The NZ Opera School gave me a lot more tools and confidence to keep pursuing this challenging but rewarding career."

"My time at the school has further motivated me to pursue a career in opera."

"I thoroughly enjoyed the masterclass with Mary Plazas, it was my first time being involved in one and I was so grateful for the opportunity. There is something vastly different from a lesson to a masterclass and as an avid watcher of master classes online it was amazing to be involved in one."





WHANGANUI OPERA WEEK

The New Zealand Opera School team worked with the Whanganui Opera Week Committee to present 8 public events that provided opportunities for the students to showcase their voices and hone their performance skills, whilst providing positive benefits for our supporters and sponsors. All performances were recorded. Ticket sales were in line with 2025 which was very positive considering a national annual reduction of 5% in ticketed events within the arts.

NZOS Artists Recital at the Whanganui Regional Museum (7 Jan 1pm)

A capacity audience of 120 were entertained by soloists Sarah Mileham, Cadence Chung, Jack Doyle and Fa'amanu Fonoti-Fuimaono. Accompanied by Bruce Greenfield. Tickets \$25

Free performance at the Sarjeant Gallery Foyer with Stephen Diaz (8 Jan 12noon)

150 audience members enjoyed this mesmerising concert accompanied by Somi Kim.

In Praise of Music at the Whanganui Collegiate Chapel (+livestream) (11 Jan 11.30am)

A stunning performance of Charles Gounod's St Cecilia Mass was enjoyed by 300 patrons - a stunning performance livestreamed online. Tickets \$20.

Organ recital with Nicholas Forbes at the Whanganui Collegiate Chapel (11 Jan 4pm)

A wonderful recital with St Matthew's organist Nicholas Forbes was enjoyed on Sunday afternoon. Koha donation.

Public Masterclass with Mary Plazas at the Prince Edward Auditorium (12 Jan 7.30pm)

190 guests enjoyed a vibrant masterclass with Mary Plazas who worked with Shana Matthews, Millie Trusttun, Sarah Mileham and Fa'amanu Fonoti-Fuimaono. Accompanied by Terence Dennis. Tickets \$25

Dining with Opera at Momiji and Reminton restaurants (14 Jan 6pm)

130 guests enjoyed a fun and interactive 'Dining with Opera' with a variety of soloists. Accompanied by Francis Cowan and Terence Dennis. Tickets \$85.

Conversations about Opera (16 Jan 2pm)

50 attendees enjoyed a thought-provoking discussion with our international tutors, Renee Casserley (CNZ) and Matthew Ross (Wellington Opera) hosted by Trustee Jack Bourke. Koha donation.

Great Opera Moments in the Royal Whanganui Opera House (+livestream) (17 Jan 7.30pm)

640 patrons attended the final performance where every student performed to great acclaim – one of the most engaging to date! Tickets \$50 / \$40 students.



AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Whilst we know our audiences are traditionally over 65 and already interested in the arts we are actively seeking new audiences for the artform and reach our audience through our marketing and advertising strategy.

Ticket prices are kept low to encourage participation from a wide range of the community and we offer a discounted package price for those wanting to attend all our events.

Our free 'pop up' concert at the Sarjeant Gallery is an effective way to engage with audience members who would not normally listen to opera. This year Stephen Diaz performed to a crowd of over 150 people.

We continue to welcome visitors from outside the region including audience members from Auckland, Wellington, Hawkes Bay and the surrounding Manawatu region. 60 guests from Wellington attended Great Opera Moments, invited and hosted by Dame Suzanne Snively at a local restaurant before attending the performance.

We were pleased to note a rise in younger audience members including many who stayed after the events to talk to the students and who sought advice from staff members and tutors. We invited two local young singers to observe lessons and musical sessions at the School, both of whom greatly appreciated the experience and who are looking to pursue music as part of their future studies.



4 JAN 2026 to 18

NEW ZEALAND OPERA SCHOOL

WHANGANUI OPERA WEEK

Tickets available at the Royal Whanganui Opera House
06 349 0511 | 10am-1.30pm
www.whanganuivenues.co.nz

Logos for Freemasons Foundation, creative NZ, Whanganui District Council, and Whanganui Opera House are also present.

"What a triumph the final concert was! You must have felt extremely happy with a FULL HOUSE and you deserve to feel proud that there is still a significant following for an audience to enjoy the potential of those who want to make opera a significant part of their career choice. I noted that the audience was a pleasing mix from young (mid 20s) onwards."



MARKETING, ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Our marketing and publicity activity for the year focused on strengthening audience reach and increasing attendance at public events. Campaigns began in September with a feature advertorial in Celebrating Whanganui, a publication showcasing the region's cultural, artistic and community highlights. Four thousand copies were distributed locally and regionally, supported by an e-book version hosted on the Whanganui Chronicle website.

The Whanganui Opera Week Committee undertook direct community engagement by distributing WOW brochures at the Saturday River Markets, receiving positive public response. Local radio stations also provided complimentary promotional support, encouraging early ticket purchases.

To broaden our media footprint, we extended coverage to include River City Press alongside the Whanganui Chronicle and MidWeek. Articles appeared across all three publications, contributing to strong regional visibility.

Our email marketing continued to play a key role. We communicated regularly with our database of 500 contacts, sharing ticket links and programme updates throughout late 2024 and into the start of the School year.

Additional Publicity Activity

- 1,000 flyers and 80 posters distributed across Whanganui.
- 1,200 flyers mailed to the Friends of the Sarjeant Gallery national network.

- **Flags & Banners:** Prominent flags and a large banner across Victoria Avenue were displayed for two months in the city provided strong visual impact.
- **Hoardings:** Four hoardings installed in Whanganui for two months.
- **Corflutes:** Displayed prominently at the front and side of the Royal Whanganui Opera House.
- **Newspaper Advertising:** A national advert in the NZ Herald and up to 10 advertisements placed in local press supported the campaign.
- **Media Coverage:** Whanganui Opera Week received extensive local and national coverage, including eight articles written by respected journalist Lin Ferguson for the Whanganui Chronicle, NZ Herald and MidWeek.



NEW ZEALAND OPERA SCHOOL

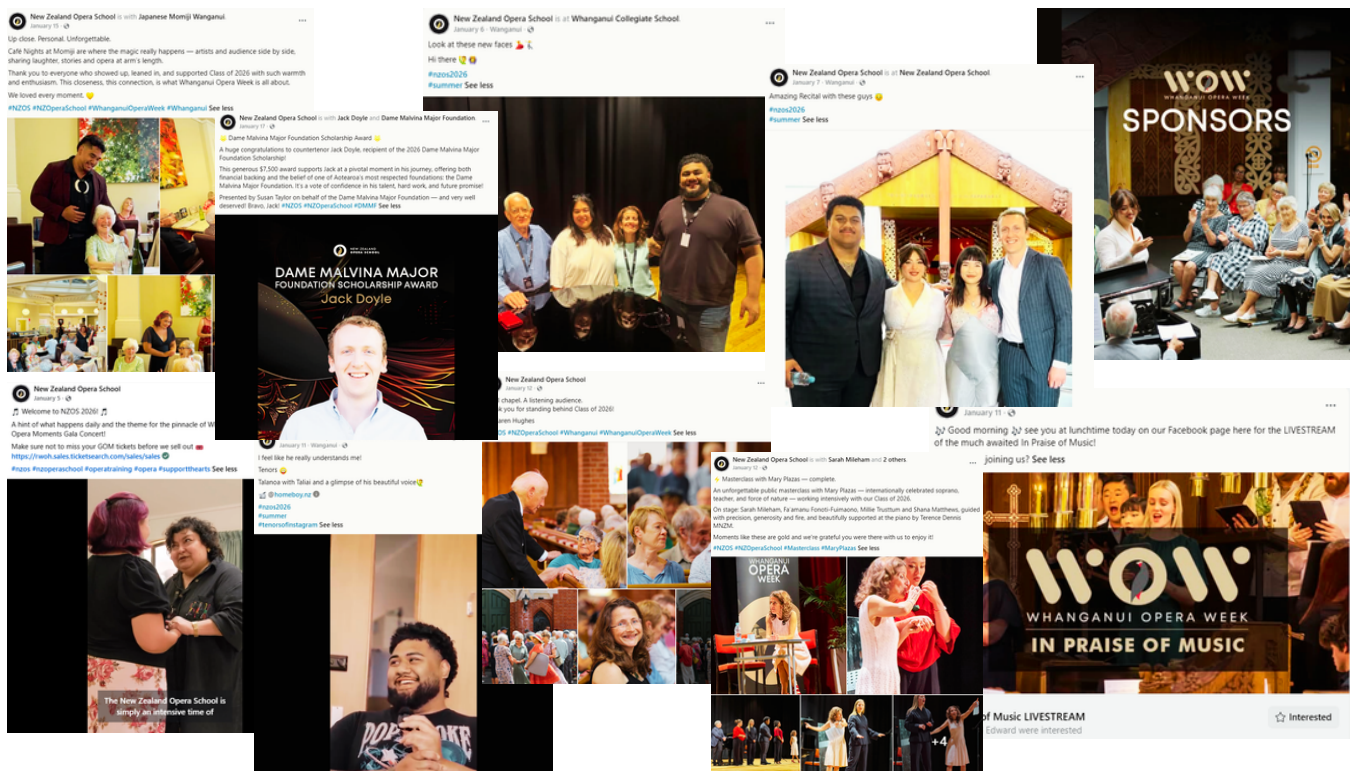
4 JAN 2026 to 18

WHANGANUI OPERA WEEK

7 Jan 1pm	Artists Recital; Whanganui Regional Museum
11 Jan 11.30am	In Praise of Music Oratorio
12 Jan 7.30pm	Public Masterclass with Mary Plazas (UK)
14 Jan 6pm	Dining with Opera
16 Jan 2pm	Conversations about Opera
17 Jan 7.30pm	'Great Opera Moments' at the Royal Whanganui Opera House

Tickets available from the Royal Whanganui Opera House | 10am-1.30pm
Purchase online at www.whanganuivenues.co.nz | 06 349 0511
www.whanganuioperaweek.nz

CAPTURED AND SHARED... NZOS SOCIAL MEDIA



During the two weeks of the NZ Opera School we look to position the School as the premier residential opera training programme in Aotearoa.

We show every aspect of our training school through our content, emphasising the uniqueness of being part of the NZOS whanau. We shine a light on each of our students so that the audience gets to know them and looks forward to following their story.

We use the platform to thank our sponsors and supporters who enable us to nurture young talent. In addition we promote the public events under the Whanganui Opera Week banner, highlighting the fact that Whanganui is the OPERA HUB of NZ each January.

During the 2026 School we shared over **180 pieces of content** and recorded over **550,000 organic views** of content on social media.

We are incredibly proud of our 7% engagement rate online. Average engagement rates for our sector are 1-3% - anything over 5% is considered exceptional.

Our online audience is **two thirds female with 27.7% over 65** but an even spread across all other age groups over 25 years of age. Our audience is interested, loyal and engaged due to our consistency coupled with a content strategy that aims to:

- Highlight alumni achievements both nationally and overseas.
- Act as a newshub for all things opera across Aotearoa.
- Be collegial and cross promote with other NZ entities to gain more reach for the sector.
- Highlight the performance opportunities available to alumni.

COMMUNITY & CULTURE

Fostering Inclusivity

We work to ensure that every young New Zealander feels they have a place at the NZ Opera School. We look to give students from every cultural background the opportunity to participate and learn through the programme.

Students are selected based on potential, aptitude, work ethic, attitude and a willingness to take calculated risks and fully immerse themselves in the process. We fundraise throughout the year to ensure that the cost to the student is as low as it can be and we also offer a hardship fund to support those that are unable to pay.

With guidance from Putiki Wharanui and Dr. Pauline Hiroti we developed Māori tikanga to build relationships (whakawhanaungatanga), set shared expectations, and foster a positive, inclusive environment.

As part of her review, Pauline noted the following: *The students were incredibly engaged and committed to the kaupapa this year, which I believe showed in their delivery of the performance. I want to also acknowledge the effort and energy that all staff placed in emphasising the importance of whanaungatanga - relationships with one another.*

I believe that by emphasising this throughout the programme, the close and respectful relationships formed created a synergy and state of flow between the cast that amplified the unity and genuine care of one another on stage. I also thoroughly enjoyed the students' enthusiasm to try new forms of movement and playfulness, which resulted in the great cancan finale, which was a highlight for me." Dr Pauline Hiroti

Student Feedback

It is essential to the success of the School that we ensure a positive and supportive environment for the students. Feedback from students in this regard was positive:

"I felt immediately welcomed by all involved, and that quickly turned into friendships and great support / mentorship for the future. There was a lot of belief in each other, and I have not experienced much like it. The constant uplifting of my peers when things got tricky or confusing was really refreshing, and the sense of belonging I felt in this space was truly great. The working-hard mentality was in full force in a positive way to get the most out of us as artists, but a keen sense of rest being part of that was key in keeping stamina and wellbeing at the forefront of the experience."



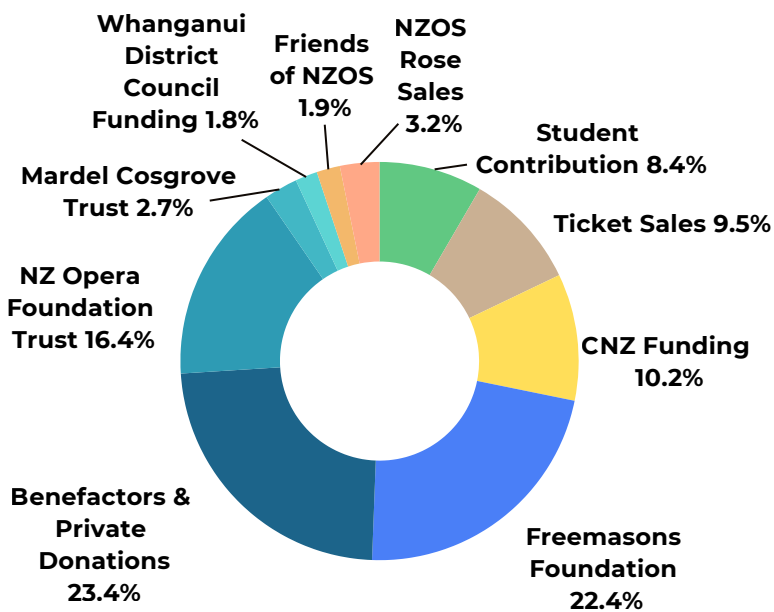
FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

Income

Support from the Freemasons Foundation, the NZ Opera Foundation Trust, CNZ and donations from private benefactors provide the key pillars of funding that support the two-week residential School.

A key focus in 2025 was the development of a benefaction programme which included the launch of the 'Friends of NZOS' programme and sale of the NZOS Rose which together generated an additional \$25,000 of funding.

The Whanganui Opera Week Committee continues to generate significant support from local businesses and individuals supporting the marketing campaign for WOW.



Applications to local, regional and national grant organisations are ongoing alongside discussions with local private Trusts.

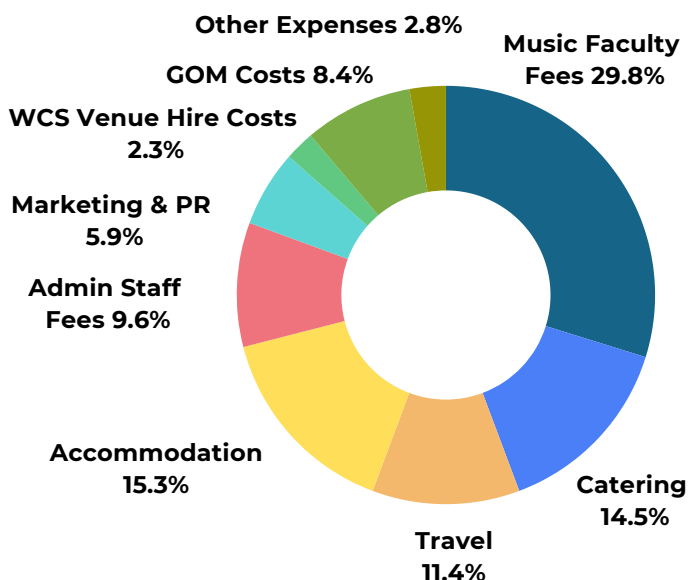
Expenses

Despite increased costs compared to 2025 the two-week School posted a profit of \$25,220 with increased sponsorship and support from donors and increased efficiencies across logistics.

43.5% of total expenses relate to the logistical costs involved in running the two week residential school (accommodation/catering/travel).

We are grateful for the support of Whanganui Collegiate Support in their provision of teaching and performance spaces alongside accommodation and catering.

Marketing & PR costs are kept to a minimum whilst maximising opportunities to share content through digital and online marketing. Costs relating to the production of Great Opera Moments comprise 8.4% of total costs where the generosity of local experts and volunteers greatly contribute to the success of the production.



ECONOMIC IMPACT

Whanganui Opera Week 4th to 18th January 2026

Whanganui Opera Week is a well-known and much-loved event in the Whanganui calendar. Local residents along with regional and national visitors attend the events being held during the fortnight, contributing to a positive economic impact for the city.

In 2026 the final weekend of Whanganui Opera Week and the gala performance of 'Great Opera Moments' coincided with Vintage Weekend, another significant destination event for Whanganui, a UNESCO city of design.

We work alongside both Vintage Weekend and Whanganui & Partners to maximise local population and visitor attendance.



Economic Contribution

Based on the spending assumptions inputs outlined below, the Events Calculator estimates that **Whanganui Opera Week's total impact on Whanganui District's economy was an additional \$1,628,014 to turnover, \$756,622 to GDP, \$445,452 to household income and 9.6 new jobs (measured as annual FTEs).**

The information is based on the following inputs:

- 1,500 attendees to events
- 500 visitors from outside the Whanganui region
- Average spend per person per day: \$350
- Removal of local consumer spend (Whanganui)

It is important to the NZ Opera School to contribute to the local economy and bring new visitors to the city. In addition we are proud to employ local experts, creatives, technicians and contractors during the two weeks of the School.

	Total Impact	Direct Impact
Turnover	\$1,628,014	\$875,000
GDP	\$756,622	\$373,713
Household Income	\$445,452	\$275,545

LOOKING AHEAD



The NZ Opera School is proud of its 32 year legacy and remains firmly focused on the future. Our team works year-round to secure funding and plan international tutors, fine tune the timetable and event programme to support the next generation of students - always looking ahead.

Opera Whanganui Trust (OWT)

Chaired by Nicola Williams MNZM, OWT was set up in 2023 with the purpose of ensuring the successful future operation of the NZ Opera School in the city of Whanganui and providing young, New Zealand opera singers with teaching of international standard.

The Trust will support the NZ Opera School in securing long-term funding support for the NZ Opera School alongside our generous benefactors and partners.

Vision

Donald is Chair of the NZ Opera Training School Board and founding Trustee. His oversight and extensive experience in opera, the arts, fundraising and financial prudence help to guide the team and set the course for the future.

Current Trustees of the NZ Opera Training School include Donald Trott (Chair), David Cairncross (Finance), Jack Bourke (Digital/Cultural Advisor) and Fergus Reid (Creative & Technical consultant). Fergus joined the Board in December 2025 and brings valuable experience as a technical and audio/visual expert in events. Based in Whanganui, Fergus has contributed for almost 10 years to the final production 'Great Opera Moments'.

Governance and Logistics

Debbie Macpherson is General Manager for the NZ Opera School and ensures the School runs efficiently and delivers maximum impact for students. Together with Donald, she maintains benefactor relationships and is responsible for budgeting, event planning, marketing, logistics and operations.

Ian Campbell is Assistant Director for the School and Jack Bourke continues to focus on the Digital Strategy for the School and acts as a liaison with Arts organisations providing alumni with performance opportunities.

Funding and Succession Planning

The team continues to apply locally and nationally for funding through government, arts organisations and charitable trusts. A key focus over the last year has been to strengthen our benefactor programme resulting in an additional \$60,000 in donations. The launch of our 'Friends of NZOS' membership programme was also very successful. Our goal is to reach 100 Friends within 2 years providing the School with additional annual income of \$25,000.

The Board and staff continue to develop a sustainable succession plan to ensure stable leadership and protect organisational knowledge, guided by Te Ao Māori principles that uphold mātauranga, continuity, and the long-term wellbeing of our collective mahi for future generations.

OUR PURPOSE

VISION

To educate and inspire New Zealand's outstanding young operatic talents so that they develop the necessary skills and have access to the best opportunities to craft sustainable careers on the world stage for New Zealand and international audiences.



MISSION

To provide a period of intensive vocal, language, movement and acting training with tutors of international reputation in order to give our emerging New Zealand opera singers the very best tuition possible and to provide a taste of the disciplines required to succeed in the fast-growing, competitive and demanding world of opera performance.



PEOPLE

We welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with organisations across the opera ecosystem in Aotearoa to ensure young singers are prepared for the demands of a career in opera. We encourage new audiences to our public performances and uphold diversity and inclusion in a way that honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi.



The relationship between the NZ Opera School and the Opera Whanganui Trust is defined by the gifting of the intellectual property and assets of the NZ Opera School to the Opera Whanganui Trust, transferring stewardship of the NZOS legacy to OWT and ensuring its future development in the city of Whanganui.

The NZ Opera Training School continues to maintain responsibility for the running of the NZ Opera School in Whanganui each January.

NZOS BOARD

Donald Trott CNZM, Chair
David Cairncross
Jack Bourke
Fergus Reid
Alex Reedijk (ex officio, Scottish Opera)

PATRON

Simon O'Neill ONZM

FOUNDING PATRON

The Hon Dame Catherine Tizard ONZ

OPERA WHANGANUI TRUST BOARD

Nicola Williams, Chair
Andrew Tripe (Whanganui District Council)
Chrystal Hika (Putiki Iwi)
Charles Bolt (Whanganui Collegiate School)

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1

Developing Highly Skilled Emerging Artists

By training young singers, coaches, and accompanists at a professional level, the School strengthens the talent pipeline for New Zealand's opera and performing arts sector.

Impact:

- Ensures a steady flow of skilled performers progressing through tertiary institutions and into national companies, festivals, and community arts roles.
- Reduces reliance on imported talent and encourages success of New Zealand singers.
- Builds future leaders who can contribute artistically *and* organisationally.

2

Creating Collaborative Learning Models

The School's training approach—masterclasses, ensemble work, cross-disciplinary coaching—acts as a model for effective capacity development.

Impact:

- Encourages collaboration rather than competition among young artists.
- Builds networks that last throughout singers' careers.
- Demonstrates a scalable training model that other arts organisations could adapt (e.g. shared coaching resources, regional residencies).

3

Integrating New Technologies and Digital Value Streams

The School looks to expand digital engagement to add resilience and reach including live-streamed performances, online vocal technique modules and recorded masterclasses available as educational resource.

Impact:

- New, diversified revenue streams that protect against uncertain in-person funding.
- Greater national access for rural or under-resourced students.
- Long-term digital assets that continue to generate value.

4

Strengthening Community and Regional Partnerships

The School has deep ties to Whanganui tangata whenua through Putiki iwi. Expanding local relationships helps to increase community engagement. NZOS looks to develop partnerships with schools, local iwi, and community choirs and develop their volunteer programme.

Impact:

- Stability through community goodwill.
- A broader base of arts-engaged New Zealanders.
- Resilience through shared local support rather than reliance on a single funder.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

5

Cultivating Industry-Ready Artists Who Understand Arts Management

Beyond pure performance training, the School can equip artists with business skills (marketing, self-management, contracts), mental wellbeing strategies, fundraising and project management basics.

Impact:

- Artists who can create their own opportunities, ensembles, and projects.
- A more entrepreneurial arts sector.
- More independent creative activity across New Zealand.

6

Expanding Cross-Sector Collaboration

The School can create value beyond the traditional performance model by collaborating with tourism (Whanganui Opera Week as a regional cultural tourism driver), health and wellbeing - music therapy, vocal health workshops and digital media and creative technology training.

Impact:

- New partnerships and revenue models.
- More diverse audiences engaging with opera.
- Innovation that helps the entire arts sector adapt to a changing environment.

7

Building a Strong Base of Supporters and Donors

Growing a committed donor community, such as “Friends of the NZ Opera School,” provides stability.

Impact:

- Financial resilience through diversified giving.
- Personal and regular contact with benefactors and financial supporters.
- Long-term sustainability for training programmes.
- Consistent support for commissions, scholarships, and new initiatives.



A LETTER FROM OUR PATRON SIMON O'NEILL ONZM



January 2026

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff of the
New Zealand Opera School

It is with immense pride and genuine joy that I write to welcome you all to the 2026 year of the New Zealand Opera School in Whanganui.

I come to this welcome wearing several hats that each mean a great deal to me: Patron of the School, former guest tutor, and—perhaps most personally—an original alum from the very first year of the School's life. I carry enormous pride in all three, and in what the New Zealand Opera School has grown to represent: excellence, generosity of spirit, and a deep belief in the future of operatic talent from this part of the world.

To the new students: congratulations on your selection. This year will challenge you, stretch you, and - if you allow it - shape you profoundly, not only as singers but as artists and colleagues. You are entering a lineage that now spans decades, and you are warmly welcomed into that family.

To the faculty and staff: thank you for the care, rigour, and belief you bring to this work. The School's reputation, both nationally and internationally, rests squarely on your commitment to nurturing young artists with honesty, high standards, and humanity.

This year carries an additional and very special note of celebration. Our founder, Donald Trott, has been appointed a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the 2026 New Year Honours List, conferred by His Majesty King Charles III.

This recognition is richly deserved. Donald's vision, perseverance, and unwavering belief in young singers have changed lives and reshaped the operatic landscape of New Zealand for the better. We are all deeply proud.

I write to you from London, where I am currently rehearsing the role of Jimmy McIntyre in *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* for English National Opera, whilst also rehearsing the Ring Cycle at the Paris Opera.

I am very much looking forward to returning next month to perform Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and later in the year to New Zealand for a concert tour of scenes from *Tannhäuser* and *Parsifal* with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. I am especially proud that these performances mark the 20-year anniversary of my debut in the role of *Parsifal* with the NZSO, alongside my mentor and teacher, the late Sir Donald McIntyre.

To all of you beginning this new year in Whanganui: may it be filled with hard work, discovery, friendship, and moments that remind you why you chose this path.

The New Zealand Opera School stands behind you, and so do all of us who have come through its doors before you.

With warmest wishes for a remarkable 2026.

Simon O'Neill ONZM
Patron, New Zealand Opera School

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Report prepared by Debbie Macpherson, General Manager



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