

## Robert Oliver's Curriculum Vitae

### Conductor, Viol player, Singer, Teacher

Robert Oliver was born in 1938, in Nelson New Zealand and educated at Nelson College and Hereworth School in Hastings. As a boy, he sang in the Nelson Cathedral Choir and was Head Chorister there. He studied at Victoria University of Wellington, graduating BA in History and Music. While in Wellington, Robert studied singing privately with Maxwell Fernie, learned 'cello and started a university choir. For 5 years, during the '60's, he financed his studies working as a postman in Wellington.

In 1966 he married Andrea and the pair travelled to England where Robert worked as freelance singer and began to trade bass viol for 'cello. In 1971 they returned to NZ with two small children and the beginnings of a collection of early music instruments.

Back in NZ, Robert worked as a full-time, freelance performer assisted by an Arts Council establishment grant. As a solo tenor he performed throughout New Zealand, with highlights including performing with an international cast (including English soprano Jane Manning) in the world premier of Gillian Whitehead's opera *Tristan et Iseult*, for the 1979 Auckland Festival. As a member of the medieval group *The Troubadours* he toured New Zealand for the *Music Federation* and Australia for *Musica Viva Australia*. Robert led renaissance group *Ensemble Dufay* during several Music Federation Tours. The ensemble appeared at the *Melbourne international Festival of Organ* and toured Europe, performing at the *Festival Estival de Paris* and broadcasting for Radio West Germany and Radio France.

He also toured with his wife, wind and keyboard player, Andrea, and also with the guitarist Milton Parker, performing throughout New Zealand.

In 1979 he returned to Europe for lessons on the bass viol with Wieland Kuijken in Brussels. For 10 years, beginning in the 1990s, he divided his time between New Zealand and England, and with Andrea, performed throughout Britain and New Zealand. They played at hundreds of schools and in public concerts, including two appearances at the *Beverley Early Music Festival* and other festivals.

He also appeared as bass viol player with the Wellington Baroque Ensemble, Sonnerie, and other New Zealand ensembles performing baroque and renaissance music.

### Cantoris & National Early Music Schools

In 1971, Robert was invited to direct the Wellington choir Cantoris and continued in this role for 20 years. During this time he established it as the first choir in New Zealand to use baroque instruments to accompany period performances, most notably with its 1986 performance of Handel's *Messiah* in the Wellington Town Hall. This was followed by several other large-scale performances concluding with the *Vespers of 1610* by Monteverdi in 1991. Cantoris' repertoire included new New Zealand choral music, including works by Jack Body, Gillian Whitehead and David Griffiths, along with other highlights including Shoenberg's *Friede auf Erden*.

Robert was awarded the QSM in 1986 for his services to music, particularly his work with Cantoris and with the National Early Music School, of which there were 6, 10-day residential schools, with tutors from England, Europe and the USA. He directed the first three, and was involved in the organization of all of them.

### Musica Sacra Concert Series

From 2001 to 2010, Robert devised and directed the *Musica Sacra Concert Series*, held in St Mary of the Angels Church, Wellington. That series presented music of the past using period instruments and performance styles, taking advantage of local musicians with international training and experience in the field, and applying the latest scholarship to their performance. Many of the *Musica Sacra* performances featured New Zealand premiers of some of the works, and brought to New Zealand audiences, works which are often neglected in live performance. Over the ten-year period, a total of more than 30 concerts were presented, the programmes including music by Charpentier, Gabrieli, Schütz, Telemann, Buxtehude and Bach. The final concert in the series was a performance of Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*, in August 2010, the 400th anniversary of its publication.

Robert played bass viol regularly with *Academia Sanctae Mariae*, an ensemble of professional musicians formed especially for the *Musica Sacra* series. He has also played bass viol with the baroque chamber ensemble, *Chrome* and with the *NZSO Chamber Orchestra*, *The Chiesa Ensemble* and in 2009 toured New Zealand for *Chamber Music New Zealand* with *Baroque Voices* and *Phantastic Spirits* performing "Love is in the Ayre," a programme of early 17th century music. Robert has broadcast both as a singer and bass viol player, and made recordings for Kiwi Pacific and Ode. He has conducted the *University Chamber Choir*, and lectured and tutored at various universities in New Zealand and Australia.

### **St Mary of the Angels Church Choir**

Robert was appointed Choir Director at St Mary of the Angels Church in 1999, and Director of Music in 2005.

His great passion for the liturgical music of Palestrina and Victoria, mean that the traditions established with such distinction by his predecessor, Maxwell Fernie, are being maintained. He has added the liturgical music of the more modern figures, James MacMillan, John Tavener and Arvo Pärt. His life-long interest in Gregorian chant, and the effect of this on his spiritual understanding, meant that he joined the Catholic Church after six years in the job.

In 2005, the first of the annual Waitangi Day masses was celebrated, an idea he had initiated the previous year by approaching the Parish Priest of Te Ngakau Tapu, Fr Colin Durning, friend and confidant of James K. Baxter, whom Robert had also known from his job as postman in the 1960's. This mass has now established itself as the official Diocesan Waitangi Day celebration, in which Maori waiata are combined with Gregorian chant.

Under his leadership, the Choir of amateur singers has made recordings (including two with Jack Body and the Indonesian Gamelan - *Darkness to Light* (2001), and *Vita Brevis* (2006)). He organized and performed at the Feast of Fools (Wellington Town Hall 2006; also 2007, 2008 and 2009) in addition to its regular work of singing of Gregorian chant and polyphonic motets for Sunday mass at St Mary of the Angels.

He also started and runs a choir for children, Young Angel Voices, and a mixed choir for school leavers, students and young people, Schola Cantorum, as part of the musical activities offered by St Mary of the Angels.

### **Palliser Viols**

In 2013 the viol consort, known as Palliser Viols, began playing together, fulfilling Robert's long-held dream.

Now consisting of six players the consort has given various performances around Wellington: as part of the St Andrews on the Terrace lunchtime series, concerts with Pepe Becker, soprano, and with Baroque Voices. Engagements in 2016 included *Sonnets and Sweet Ayres* with Colin Durning reading a selection of James K. Baxter's Jerusalem sonnets, performed in St Joseph's Church,

Hiruharama (Jerusalem), a performance at Te Papa in conjunction with the exhibition *Splendour*, and a public concert in Futuna Chapel, Karori, of 5-part consort music by Jenkins, Lawes and Ferrabosco.

He lives in the house he and Andrea bought when they first married. He enjoys maintaining the building, and tending the steep ¼-acre section. Although available time and diminishing fitness limit his abilities to indulge his love of spending time in remote bush areas, his love of indigenous forest is an important part of his life. He continues to direct the three choirs, teach singing and viol technique, and daily practises bass viol.

Youtube has performances by Palliser Viols, Young Angel Voices (enter: YAV Farquhar), and the St Mary of the Angels Choir.

Stuff website has a video interview with Robert showing a rehearsal with the men of St Mary of the Angels Choir: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/well-good/inspire-me/71257193/ageing-new-zealand-workers-show-no-signs-of-slowng-down>