



EUROPEAN TOUR LAUNCH, 11 MARCH 2005
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NZSO CHIEF EXECUTIVE

This is a very exciting day for the NZSO. The announcement that I am about to make is one that we have been working towards intensively for two and half years – and been dreaming about for even longer.

Today is a landmark day. . . . the NZSO is going to the Proms!

In August, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra will be travelling to the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Japan to present some very high-profile concerts under the direction of our Music Director James Judd.

This is the largest tour outside New Zealand that the NZSO has ever undertaken. It is happening at the right time – the orchestra is in superb form and that is being recognized internationally in the extraordinary reviews that we have been receiving for our CD recordings.

And the good news doesn't stop there. If European audiences are to be impressed with the quality of the extraordinary New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, we are quite sure they will be equally pleased with our choice of soloists – none other than two New Zealand icons – Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and Jonathan Lemalu.

We have been looking for an opportunity to work again with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa for some time. I am proud that that opportunity should come with this important tour.

Our CD with Jonathan Lemalu is due for release in the UK in April. We have heard the finished master and we know that the engineers and music staff at EMI in London are thrilled with it. It will be so good to appear with Jonathan, riding the wave of a very successful recording, this time in totally different repertoire – Mahler's songs from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*.

And, of course, the concerts on the tour will be conducted by James Judd. I feel that this is a very fitting climax to James's seven years with us as Music Director. When I first joined the totally re-configured NZSO board under the leadership of Sir Selwyn Cushing in 1996, the orchestra was still reeling from the disappointment and embarrassment of having to cancel its first invitation to appear at the Proms. In a way, I am sure it will turn out to be a good thing that we have finally made it nine years later. Those nine years have been devoted to building standards and there is no one person who has contributed more to this than James Judd.

Our Japanese audiences in Aichi will be enchanted by our concertmaster Vesa-Matti Lepänen performing the beautifully evocative 'Nostalghia' by Toru Takimitsu. We are pleased to also announce that Preman Tilson, the NZSO's principal bassoon, will be heard as the featured soloist in the Mozart bassoon concerto. So, where is this tour taking us?

We arrive in London on 13 August and will spend a couple of days finding our feet and rehearsing in the auditorium of the Royal College of Music – just across the road from the Royal Albert Hall.

On 16 August, we will be playing in Snape Maltings as part of the Snape Proms run in conjunction with the Aldeburgh Festival. Dame Kiri will feature with us on that night.

Two days later on 18 August, we give a concert in the largest and most famous orchestral festival in the world – the BBC Proms, held in London's Royal Albert Hall. Our soloist that night is Jonathan Lemalu.

We fly the next day to present the same programme in one of Europe's most sought-after concert halls – the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

And finally, we travel to Japan to represent New Zealand at the World Expo being held in Aichi.

Throughout the tour we will have a team from TVNZ with us – led by Philippa Mossman with Justin Pemberton directing. They are creating a documentary that will aim to allow audiences back home a chance to share in the thrill of playing in these magnificent venues is like and at the same time give a behind-the-scenes picture of the realities for our musicians in undertaking a tour on this scale.

As you can imagine, we have thought long and hard about what music to take to Europe and Japan. The complete programmes can be found in the press kits. I simply want to comment here that we wanted to demonstrate the extraordinarily high standard of the NZSO through taking on some of the major symphonic repertoire – the repertoire that Proms, Snape, and Concertgebouw audiences expect to hear superbly played by the best orchestras in the world. But, of course, we also wanted to seize this opportunity to make audiences outside New Zealand aware of the extraordinary richness and variety of our music.

There is now a huge body of really distinguished work to draw on – so the choices here were not easy to make (and were partly determined by practicalities such as instrumentation and timing). At the Proms we will be play Douglas Lilburn's third Symphony – a work that is coming to be accepted internationally as a masterpiece. In other concerts, we are performing works by Gareth Farr, Ross Harris, and David Farquhar. All are wonderfully accomplished compositions and all have been chosen with first-listening accessibility in mind.

A tour on this scale is a major undertaking and -- even though we receive substantial revenues for each of the concerts in Europe -- it is expensive. Two years ago, we set out to find \$1.2 million -- and we've done it, thanks to a remarkable partnership between corporate sponsors, private benefactors, and the various government agencies with an interest in promoting New Zealand abroad. The tour is financially self-contained -- in other words, not one cent of the annual operating grant that the NZSO receives from the government to carry out its mission for New Zealanders has had to be allocated to this project. This is important -- the overseas tour is a stand-alone project that does not impinge in any way on the normal financial management of the orchestra.

We have two major corporate partners for the tour without whose confidence and imagination this could not be happening. The Guinness Peat Group -- who are long-standing principal sponsors of the NZSO -- have greatly increased their investment in the orchestra specifically to facilitate this tour. From relatively early on in the planning phases, we knew that we had the support of Sir Ron Brierley and Tony Gibbs. That gave an enormous boost to our planning and all of us in the NZSO are tremendously grateful to them for their help.

Air New Zealand -- the country's flag-carrying airline -- is making it possible for us to carry the banner for New Zealand culture through providing substantial assistance with our travel. I would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Chief Executive Ralph Norris, and Group General Manager Norm Thompson for their strong support.

There have been a number of private benefactors who have contributed materially to its success. But way out at the top of this list is our own Chairman, Sir Selwyn Cushing. Sir Selwyn has chaired the NZSO board since 1996. His love for the orchestra has always been very evident and his contribution to its welfare is quite honestly inestimable. But his personal generosity in ensuring that this tour would be financially viable is very special.

One of the most pleasing aspects of the government's interest in this tour is that it has had several dimensions. Four government organisations -- all concerned with New Zealand's image abroad -- have contributed. We have worked closely with George Hickton and David Burt at Tourism New Zealand, with Tim Gibson and Julian Moore at New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, with Simon Murdoch and James Kember at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and with Martin Matthews, Jane Kominik and the team that regularly keeps an eye on the NZSO at the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. In this context, I should also thank Philip Gibson and Mike Pattison of the World Expo taskforce in Aichi for their enthusiasm and support.

The biggest component in the funding that we have received from public sources has come through the new Cultural Diplomacy International Programme announced in the last budget and jointly administered by the four ministries just mentioned. Our grant from this fund is quite specifically so that we can represent New Zealand at Aichi. We are pleased and proud that the capacity of the NZSO to demonstrate New Zealand's cultural sophistication has been recognized in this way.

I must also thank our Minister, (the Prime Minister) Helen Clark, and her Associate Minister Judith Tizard for the interest and support that they have shown in this project ever since they were first briefed on it over two years ago.

Summarization

The NZSO is going to the Proms. It is a huge honour to be among the handful of world-class orchestras chosen to perform in this series. Tickets for this event will be very sought after since the overseas orchestras always excite particular interest.

As well as treating audiences to the magnificent NZSO, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and Jonathan Lemalu share the stage with us at the Royal Albert Hall, the Concertgebouw and Snape Maltings. Vesa-Matti Leppänen and Preman Tilson are the featured soloists in Aichi, Japan.

This tour is the culmination of a dream that couldn't have been realised without major support from our corporate, government and individual partners. It marks an important rite of passage for the NZSO as it moves from a national treasure to an international star, at home in any concert hall anywhere. Of all the wonderful reviews in international publications that we have received in the last few years my favourite is the one that read "... the New Zealanders who, while I wasn't watching, have become a major orchestra, actually outplay the Israel Philharmonic and the New York Philharmonic" [in their recording of Bernstein symphonies]. Now is the right time, to really show the world what we can do.

Thank you to everyone who has made this possible.