

# The Devonport Arts Festival

## Nigel Keay - composer, musician, conductor and organiser

Devonport musician and composer Nigel Keay will have the triple role of performer, conductor and composer next Thursday night, 15 February when Ensemble Philharmonia, a group of musicians from the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra give an evening concert in the Friendly Societies Hall at 93 Victoria Rd (opposite the Devonport Three Cinemas, the venue for the Devonport Arts Festival series of eight evening classical music concerts. Along with Nico Francken, he has also played a major role in organising the classical music component of this year's festival.

Nigel was last year's Composer in Residence for the Auckland Philharmonia. He graduated from the Victoria University School of Music in 1983 and has worked as a free-lance musician, teacher and composer ever since. For him 1995 was an extremely busy time. The residency position he regards as a major highlight in his career and a "tremendous opportunity." At the same time it involved a "huge amount of work."

Nigel composes constantly and although demanding "large chunks of time" and probably being the most important thing he does, it is usually the least well paid. The residency was a chance to concentrate on composition but he had to keep everything else he was doing ticking along as well. "I couldn't just shut myself away because I knew I would have to come back into the real world afterwards and pick it all up again," he said.

Even if he could he wouldn't give his teaching, performing and musician session work away.

It is his "contact with the world." He is an associate viola player for the Philharmonia and he regards this as valuable experience.

"I get an inside view of how the orchestra functions and this helps my composition immensely."

He works in a basement room in his home in Lake Rd. From upstairs, during the school holidays, you can hear the footsteps of his two children playing. The room has the basic requirements for composition. It is "almost" sound proofed. There's an electric keyboard which he uses for testing pitch, melody and rhythm.

He isn't concerned with making this sound like an orchestra because he can imagine the balances and timbres. A MIDI system links the keyboard to a computer with two monitors - one for the controls and one to display the musical score.

He is putting the final touches to a five



movement symphony which will be performed in the Aotea Centre on August 1 as part of this year's Auckland Philharmonia Main 1996 series. In 1992 he wrote a 53 minute long opera, which he regards as his major work to date. The new symphony will be his most ambitious work yet for large orchestra. Another piece, his Fanfare, was performed in the centre by the Philharmonia last year.

Nigel has lived in Devonport for three years and, using his contacts in the APO, has played a major part in the organising of this year's classical music component in the Devonport Arts Festival.

He sees it as an opportunity to get an

airing for contemporary New Zealand music. Most of the evening performances will play at least one contemporary New Zealand piece, although he is anxious to point out there will be plenty of "Mozart, Mendelsohn, Bach, Shostakovich etc for the traditionally minded." "We have aimed at getting in a good mix."

The classical music part of the festival is much more comprehensive than ever before. There are eight evening and eight lunch time concerts. Nico's securing of the Friendly Societies Hall as a dedicated venue has been a big bonus as it means the room can be arranged with seating and a piano installed for the whole week.

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Nigel hopes the Devonport festival will become an increasingly important part of the calendar for Auckland's music lovers providing an airing for local musicians as well as local composers.

"There are some very fine musicians in the APO. You might think they would have no trouble finding opportunities for chamber music but there are not really many performing platforms available in Auckland. I think it is important to give our local musicians support."

Two of Nigel Keay's works : Sextet played by the Philharmonia Ensemble (and conducted by Nigel) on Thursday night and on Sunday February 18. The Real Strings Quartet will perform his String Quartet No 2 which he describes as "a very rhythmic piece influenced by jazz and rock music."

Other performances of contemporary New Zealand music to watch out for are: on Saturday February 10 the Kandinsky ensemble giving a premiere of John Psathas's Three Island Songs - which Nigel said is likely to be "very dynamic , very energetic and heavily influenced by Greek dance music." On Sunday 11 February The Urban Piano Trio, a new group making its debut, will play a piece by Auckland composer John Elmsly. The Ensemble Philharmonia will also play a piece by Helen Bowater's (Helen was the APO's composer of 1994.) Nigel will be playing viola. On Friday 16 September, the young clarinetist Andrew Uren, recently back from Holland where he studied with master bass clarinetist Harry Sparnay, will play A Chaos of Delight by Auckland composer Eve De Castro Robinson.

A full series of 9 lunch time concerts will run from 12.45pm each day of the festival at the same venue. These feature soloists and small ensembles playing mostly works by the great composers

There is also a Sunday concert at 4pm with pianist Henry Wong Doe playing works by Beethoven, Debussy and Chopin and a guitar master class at 10am on Sunday 18.

Not all these concerts are printed on the Festival Programme but full details are available at the Library.\*