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New Zealand OPERA NEWS

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Brass Poppies

Stephen Mulqueen's Brass Poppies

Brass Poppies



Jonathan Alver director of the new chamber opera *Brass Poppies* says that the Kiwi opera's strength lies in it being an incredibly domestic piece

Jonathan Alver who so successfully understood and staged their previous masterwork *Requiem for the Fallen* directs the production of Ross Harris's and Vincent O'Sullivan's opera *Brass Poppies*, a joint venture between NZ Opera, the New Zealand Festival in Wellington and the Auckland Arts Festival.

Alver's previous productions such as *Aida* and *Falstaff* for New Zealand Opera are well-remembered productions.

He maintains a strong interest in opera and is currently director of Whanganui's annual New Zealand Opera School.

Alver's musical, vocal and well-rounded directing background is a decided asset for a project such as this.

"Having the music at your fingertips and being able to understand an orchestral score enables you to understand the intentions of the composer and then translate them visually for an audience."



Brass Poppies presents the tragedy of Gallipoli on the domestic New Zealand front as well as in the trenches of Chunuk Bair, as wives and families deal with the pressure of their men fighting on the other side of the world.

As Alver says "its strength lies in it being an incredibly domestic piece".

As you will see from the editor's conversations in this issue all involved say that "We're all determined that it doesn't come out as a grand commemoration of World War I," as Alver says. "Opera is always at its best when there is a direct line to the heart and

the voices tell a story keyed to the emotions as well as presenting a narrative. We want to take people back to Wellington 100 years ago, showing the pride of the men and the devastation for the women, never knowing how their partners died."

There will be no razzamatazz, he says, or empty theatrical flair, although it will be colourful.

"The Wellington that the soldiers left back then was just as bright and beautiful as it is now," he says. "Often we remember this period in sepia tones and brown-and-white images make it so much easier for us to distance ourselves."

The presentation of *Brass Poppies* shows it as very much an ensemble piece, with the 10 instrumentalists of Stroma, including cornet and violin alongside accordion and Middle Eastern doumbek drum on stage throughout, with nine singers and two dancers. This exciting and affecting ensemble piece is in the very accomplished and capable hands of conductor **Hamish McKeich**

Alver's five years spent working on television programmes such as *Shortland Street* and *Go Girls* will also come into play. With his extensive experience of how to stage and make appropriate impact a series of screens on stage will feature digital footage of the singers alongside what is being performed live.

He gives one example of "a character recounting a letter while, on the screen, we can watch the reaction of the person who's receiving it. The screens allow us to see what's going on inside for these people."

This technology lets him focus within the traditional proscenium arch and "direct the audience on a journey that has been set up to even control the close-ups".



Harris and O'Sullivan have "a real sense of theatre," Alver says. "They love the idea that there are so many layers to this piece."

Audiences can also expect to experience flesh-and-blood New Zealanders on stage, from **James Egglestone's** William Malone to **Anna Leese** as soldier Tommo's wife Mary, "so beautifully open to her feelings in her

stunning aria".

Best of all, for Alver, is the evening's crisp 70 minutes' running time. "It's a good length for these times," he says. "I hope the audience will not be limited to opera-lovers, but to all theatre-goers who understand drama and passionate emotional involvement. This story is so powerful, especially in such an intimate theatrical environment."

All who value the important place of music, drama, opera and humanity in our society should experience this piece.



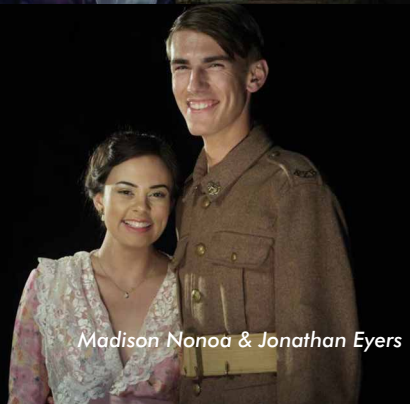
Anna Leese & Robert Tucker



Sarah Court & James Eggleston



Mary Newman-Pound & Wade Kernot



Madison Nonoa & Jonathan Evers

Jonathan Alver – A Director's Note for *Brass Poppies*

Amere 100 years has passed since the dreadful tragedy of **Chunuk Bair** where so many New Zealanders were killed but, despite photographic and filmic evidence, we have little real understanding of the experience for those soldiers and their families. They are characters locked away in a dusty sepia world, people of another time with a sense of duty, manners and conventions different from our own. We can recognise the awful loss of life, but we have no real sense of how that felt. We can look at the photographs of WWI, listen to the stories told by those who survived, but more often than not the history we are told is written and approved through official channels, the details massaged to highlight glory and heroism to make the calamity more palatable and reflect a greater good.

What would they who died tell us?

Many operas have a true historical setting, and some of those are based on real-life characters, but opera was not created to teach us history. Instead, the exquisite conjunction of music, stage and voice brings characters to life, connecting us directly to the human condition, to the hearts of the personalities before us, allowing us to share their thoughts and feelings.

In *Brass Poppies*, **Ross** and **Vincent** have reflected on one of the darkest days in New Zealand history, but not to simply commemorate the tragic events. They have put flesh on the dry bones of some of the real and imagined personalities involved, literally giving them a voice to share snapshots of their experiences with us, telling us how it might have felt and inviting us to put ourselves in their shoes.

In staging this opera, whilst using some original photographic images, I am keen to break away

from sepia and to bring those characters and the world around them into full colour. The Wellington the soldiers left was as colourful and beautiful as it is now and the land where they died was also full of colour. Indeed, the approach to the peak of Chunuk Bair was made along Rhododendron Spur!

Hopefully *Brass Poppies* will bring back to life for a short time, in full colour, those whose lives were touched by these events, inviting us to share their experiences and feelings and to heed their warnings to never tolerate another Great War.

New Zealand Festival Artistic Director, Shelagh Magadza says the opera makes an important contribution to New Zealand's World War I commemorations.

"*Brass Poppies* will endure as a legacy to mark this period. Shifting the World War I story from the battlefield and into the home, *Brass Poppies* acknowledges the impact had on the wives and families of the soldiers, a story which will speak to many New Zealanders."

Directed by **Jonathan Alver** and conducted by **Hamish McKeich**, with award-winning tenor **James Egglestone** as Lieutenant-Colonel William Malone, *Brass Poppies* is a story that will speak to many New Zealanders and stay with them long after the curtain falls.

'Vincent O'Sullivan's elegant poetry has long inspired composer Ross Harris, their combined breadth of expression moving and delighting audiences' – *The Listener*

'extremely visionary ... thunderous and awe-inspiring' – *Radio New Zealand Concert* (*Requiem for the Fallen*)

There has been a casting change for *Brass Poppies* as **Wendy Doyle** who was playing Mrs Malone has unfortunately had to pull out of the production.

We were sorry to hear that but we are pleased to say Mrs Malone is now to be played by mezzo-soprano **Sarah Court**.

A co-production between New Zealand Opera, New Zealand Festival and Auckland Arts Festival

Composer Ross Harris
Libretto Vincent O'Sullivan
Conductor Hamish McKeich
Director Jonathan Alver

Cast

Sarah Court	Mrs Malone
Mary Newman-Pound	Lucy
Robert Tucker	Tommo
Jonathan Eysers	Billy
Wade Kernot	Fred
Andrew Glover	Turk/Patriot
James Egglestone	William Malone
Anna Leese	Mary/Luck
Madison Nonoa	Joyce

Co-produced by New Zealand Festival, Auckland Arts Festival and New Zealand Opera, with support from Lottery Grants Board.

Supported by Peter and Carolyn Diessl, NZ Opera, WW100 Fund, Creative New Zealand

New Zealand Festival
(26 Feb-20 Mar 2016)

When: Thursday 3 March – Sunday 6 March 2016, 7.30pm

Where: Shed 6



Sarah Court - Mrs Malone



Mary Newman-Pound - Lucy



Robert Tucker - Tommo



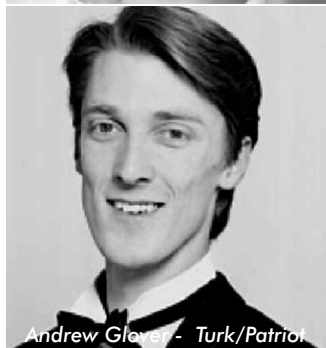
Wade Kernot



Jonathan Evers - Billy



*James Egglestone -
William Malone*



Andrew Glover - Turk/Patriot



Anna Leese - Mary/Luck



Madison Nonoa - Joyce

Tickets: A\$69 (excl fees)

Duration: 1 hour, 10 mins (no interval)

**Bookings: Tickets from Ticketek or
festival.co.nz**

**For more information visit:
www.festival.co.nz**

Auckland Arts Festival **(2-20 March 2016)**

**When: Friday 11 March & Saturday 12
March 2016, 8.00pm**

Where: The Mécyr Theatre, Auckland

**(please note change of venue from
previously advertised).**

**Tickets: A Res \$65, A Res Friend/Conc/
Group \$59, B Res \$53, B Res Friend/Conc/
Group \$48**

Duration: 1 hour, 10 mins (no interval)

**Bookings: Book at Ticketmaster outlets:
www.ticketmaster.co.nz**

P: 09 970 9700 or 0800 111 999

With surtitles

**For more information visit:
www.aucklandfestival.co.nz**

Editor Garth Wilshire in conversation with Ross Harris the composer of the new Chamber Opera *Brass Poppies* being performed at The New Zealand Festival in Wellington and then as part of The Auckland Arts Festival in Auckland

This conversation was in late November last year

Garth Wilshire: I'm talking with Ross Harris, composer of *Brass Poppies*.

My first question is: where did the idea to write it as a chamber opera come from?

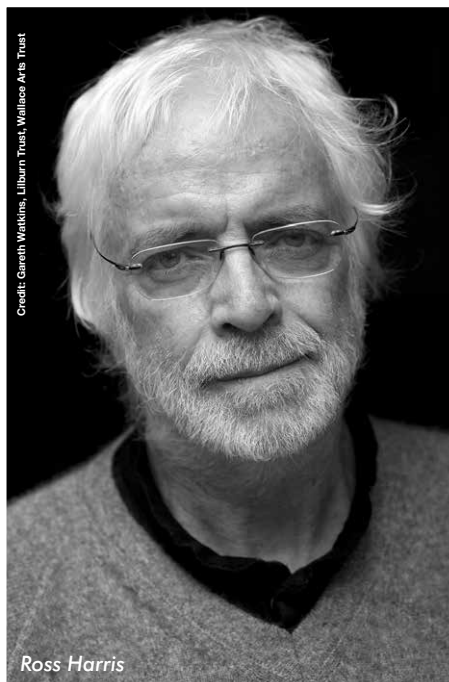
Ross Harris: The idea originally was **Vincent O'Sullivan's**. We had written an opera called *Black Ice*, which was based in Tsarist Russia. It was a big opera and we realised that there was so little chance of performance in this country! We thought that we should try a different approach, a chamber opera. Chamber opera obviously uses smaller resources. I saw that would be important.

GW: And did the story come from reading letters? How did you reach the concept?

RH: Well, Vincent did the research. What's, actually, quite interesting is that a lot of things that have come out later are in **Malone's letters** (*New Zealand World War I Colonel William Malone* – Ed). It was that sort of documentation which wasn't available eight years ago or so. I don't think that Vincent actually used those as a resource if they were ever available. The piece is not based on historical fact particularly, I mean **Malone's** there and the soldiers and so the basic scenario is that of the time. There is no attempt to try and be too faithful to what happened, it's an opera, it's a dramatisation of a set of circumstances, and most importantly, in the conception of the work which was also Vincent's idea, is that the women at home in Wellington be on stage at the same time as the men at Gallipoli, because one of the problems with writing an opera about soldiers is that there are only men in it.

GW: You would put the two sides together and the fact that they're all on stage at the same time puts that idea in perspective. Obviously the play *Once on Chunuk Bair* by **Maurice Shadbolt** has only the men. And to have both sides on stage creates a bit more interest and also makes it a little closer to life ...

RH: That's right and it gives the work much more depth of course and it humanises it in a



deep way really. There's one very interesting theme which I think which gives you an sense of how this idea has sort of climaxed at least at Chunuk Bair itself because the elements there are with the dance and so the kind of violence of war is carried by the percussion, by the orchestra and the dance which includes two professional dancers that are also the soldiers themselves or some kind of stylised action. That is quite full on in a way. But the women are also there and I don't know how, **Jonathan (Alver, the director – Ed)** is going to direct this because that's his problem – (*laughs*). The women are going to be in Wellington hanging out the washing on a clothesline – doing normal everyday activities at home and so with the contrast shocking – with men away at war.

GW: Yes, and with very telling impact I'm sure.

RH: Because they know nothing of what's happening, and then as the men die the Turk just comes round and catches them on the shoulder, there's no shooting or there's not a single gunshot in the whole piece.

GW: It's all obviously as symbolically suggested.

RH: In a sense it's much, much better. There's a quote by **Tony Judt** who said that, "hell is a non-transferrable experience" or something close to that. And I've learned that that's really the case if you want to create many intense feelings about something, I mean like this bloody, terrible battle. You cannot just have people shooting each other on stage it becomes trivialised, bloody...

GW: It takes it out of human context

RH: In all of the pieces that I've done with Vincent that there's very much a human element involved even though they're kind of the big picture. And that works for opera, of course.

GW: What drew you to the mix of instrumentation you are using to represent the time, the people, the characters, the period?

RH: It's kind of the nature of a little band, isn't it, really? Well I'm an accordionist myself, and the guitar, you know, these are instruments that would or could have been in the trenches. But not just that, but they make a fabulous combination with the other things. So there's that and there's the little drum kit and add the cornet and the clarinet and the bassoon and you're not a thousand miles from the *Soldier's Tale* either.

GW: I know having heard that lots of times, how effective those forces can be.

RH: There's only the violin and the bass so there's a lack of kind of warmth in the ensemble, and of course the cor anglais is my indulgence, it's such a beautiful instrument and of course very expressive as a soloist but also it just clunks around in the ensemble as well.

GW: And of course using that instrument, you have at your disposal some of the finest cor anglais players around!

RH: Well that's right but you know when we wrote this work we had no idea how it ever

would be put on and one hoped that there would be a cor player good enough to do it, but the work itself is not that difficult in any other respect, I don't believe, it's not highly modernistic, it's much more in the vein of, I don't, I don't like to name names because people climb on them and think "oh yes, that's right" – a little bit of **Kurt Weill** and obviously the **Stravinsky** too, I've mentioned but I don't think either of those are going to be like "Oh my God, it is like that!"

GW: No. Well, they are, the references that crossed my mind because they're both composers I know well and have heard lots of. And I know how effectively often quite quirky instrumentation can work because it helps to characterise in a way that great lush orchestras don't.

RH: Big orchestras, they're not really part of what this piece is about and it's always been important to us that it's seen very close to the ground. Earthy, but not crude.

GW: And again that's something else you can't depict and that's something that I thought worked extremely well in *Requiem for the Fallen* was that there was enough grittiness to be believable.

RH: Another thing that I find very interesting is that a lot of opera of course is quite slow, I mean go to **Wagner's** the extreme, but musicals go very quickly. Now this helps the pace of something much faster than ordinary old-fashioned opera. That interests me because I'm not thinking, well, I'm hoping that anybody who goes to it will experience it as, in a way something new.

GW: And, and also I wanted to ask in terms of how the singers are used, sort of put together in your mind, how and why they are the way they're going to be?

RH: Yes, well that's a good question. And I'll simply say I have no idea what Jonathan's doing but we can talk about what my conception of the piece was, and particularly in the let's say, the opening scene which kind of tumbles into the community hall and people are having fun and they're saying goodbye to their men, and the men are saying, this is all great and we'll be back soon, it's going to be fun and aren't these men handsome in their uniforms, they're dancing and even in that part of the piece the *music* starts to turn slightly sour, there's a hint of foreboding. And then it's as though it's a kind of moment when suddenly you realise that things aren't quite as they should be – and they're all having a premonition. Then there's dancing when they get kind of drunk before they go into battle and then there's the dance at the end when the men are dead and they repeat the slowed down music from the opening community hall.

GW: But that's humans, and human nature and you want that to be represented.

RH: Yes. It's close to reality but it isn't of course ever –

GW: No, of course not! What was your specific inspiration for the title, *Brass Poppies*? Did that come from something specific?

RH: Yes, very specific actually. Brass poppies are a brooch made by a guy called **Stephen Mulqueen** who's a Dunedin sculptor and jeweller and he makes these brass brooches out of shell cases and they're very beautiful. Vincent actually owns one that is where the title came from. (See **Footnote 1** below – Ed)

GW: The things I was going to come onto next is that you and Vincent always you collaborate and work seamlessly and interestingly together. I've experienced a few of your pieces and they've always been extremely effective. And I'm sure this one will be too, even more so because we are in this 100 year commemoration.

GW: People often ask have we had too much reference to WWI? Well, it is a concern but there's too much when a lot of it is done in such a sort of mawkish banal fashion and what we need are things like *Requiem for the Fallen*, which was one of the most magnificent, telling examples I can recall, and I'm sure that *Brass Poppies* will resonate in a similar sort of way.

Is there anything else specific you'd like to talk about in relation to your creation?

RH: Well, no I think that's probably enough, and I've probably said way too much in fact.

GW: Thankfully *Requiem for the Fallen* has been picked up and been performed elsewhere and I presume one day it will get recorded if it hasn't already been?

RH: It is in progress. I've just come back from Brisbane where I was at the second performance of the **Gallipoli Symphony** – do you know what that is?

GW: I've read about it – I don't know a lot about it. (See **Footnote 3** below – Ed)

RH: The concept was of ten years of pieces to be written and to be performed during the night of the day of the 25th April at Gallipoli. There were five Australians, three Turks and two New Zealanders.

GW: You were one of the New Zealanders?

RH: Yeah, and **Gareth Farr**. **Richard Nunns** worked with him on his piece and sometimes gets a mention, but it was kind of a risky thing to string it all together – different composers, although the later ones could hear what the earlier ones had done, and could react to it and so I just wanted to see it in the light; I don't remember paying too much attention and it was performed in an ensemble, and I don't really need to talk about this but I'm still slightly bemused by what happened and I had mixed feelings about the piece. It ends rather positively, and a bright kind of future with the three nations contributing to the work which is good. The people in the audience in Gallipoli were diplomats and soldiers and they didn't know what to make of it, at all.

GW: So in a sense that's a shame –

RH: Oh, terrible! But in, in Brisbane it was just a general all out audience who were completely blown away and leapt to their feet.

GW: Oh wonderful.

GW: Just the way that ordinary other people would experience it.

RH: Exactly! It was a shame that it had to be done, in almost a kind of protected environment.

RH: I mean, no average Turk got anywhere near it –

GW: which essentially misses the point of what they were trying to achieve.

RH: Exactly! It was almost like it was going to be done in a sort of bubble to make sure it was all right! So, the response in Brisbane was absolutely amazing. It is an essentially an Australian piece and the Turkish people were quite strong, but Gareth and I were both doing solos, melancholy things, which are actually necessary in the context of the Western world but they don't, stand out, I think, almost a kind of typical Kiwi thing.

GW: We try to think – what is the New Zealand way, what does New Zealand classical music sound like? And there is a stream running through – it's rather like it's in the ether, I suppose, and it's just part of what we are.

RH: I've certainly had periods where I didn't want to be a **Lilburnian** or belonging to anything at all, as you would expect but it kind of just happens anyway.

GW: Well, it's almost by osmosis. But these things do filter through without people knowing that they've filtered there.

I wanted to talk about *Requiem for the Fallen*. As a concept I just loved every minute of it – I thought it worked brilliantly. There were two things that stood out for me, though. Firstly I was so pleased that **Richard (Greager)** was there because he gave such a gritty, such a believable, and such a real performance.

RH: Absolutely!

GW: I loved that.

RH: And it was such a contrast to the rest of the sound. What did you think about **Horomona's** role? (**Horomoana Horo** on toanga pūoro, original Maori instruments – Ed)

GW: Oh, absolutely stunning, and yes secondly I loved the use of taonga pūoro and the contrast they made with the **New Zealand String Quartet**, **Voices New Zealand** and the solo voice. I do honestly think it's one of the best pieces to have come out of New Zealand in recent times. I think it deserves wide, wide attention.

RH: Oh, well, that's very kind of you to say.

GW: Thanks, and I'm so pleased that *Brass Poppies* is going to be in both cities, and we, as audience members, are very excited about it too.

RH: Great, fantastic! Well, I hope it delivers!

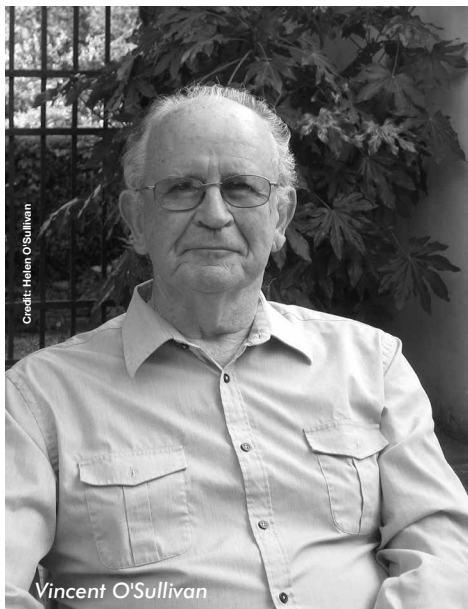
GW: I'm sure it will. Thank you so much Ross.

Editor Garth Wilshire in conversation with Vincent O'Sullivan the librettist for the new Chamber Opera *Brass Poppies* being performed at The New Zealand Festival in Wellington and then as part of The Auckland Arts Festival in Auckland

This conversation was in early December last year

Garth Wilshire: I want to talk through some thoughts about *Brass Poppies*. The first question I wanted to ask was, what was it that alerted you to the story and the reason to decide that this was something you wanted to formulate as an opera?

Vincent O'Sullivan: Ross and I had already done a couple of things related to the war, like Ross's *Second Symphony*, and *Requiem for the Fallen*. When there was the opportunity of doing an opera relating to the war, setting it and relating it to Wellington, it seemed fairly obvious, why not take one of the most celebrated or notable events in the Gallipoli campaign, the Chunuk Bair incident, because that was the Wellington regiment, after all. And we also wanted it to be about women as much as men. Obviously the emphasis in war, and when we read about war, is always what's happening to the men, but of course there's always another what you might call 'a ghost war' going on at home.



GW: Oh, absolutely! And often that's the one that is actually the more telling to society because it goes way beyond just the heroics or the deaths or whatever.

VO: Exactly! So it seemed obvious to try and make it not two separate stories, but two stories braided or plaited together. And the young men from Wellington going off and the women, the young women and then the older women too, who stayed home and so we set that part of it in the Aro Valley. **Colonel William Malone** may be the hero of the Wellington regiment, but of course his was very much a domestic story too, of leaving a family and children. So there was that double interest from the start. It was a fable of individual families and groups and couples, it wasn't in any sense a "ra – ra" thing about war.

GW: No, I understand that, and that's of course why *Requiem for the Fallen* was such a strong work, because that mix between an old soldier's burden, if you like, and what was happening back home and afterwards, and I think that meant that the relevance and the emotion was much stronger and it made for a much more powerful piece.

- VO: Well, I hope so, because in my view there's no such thing as a good war. There's a war you might militarily win but a war has losers on both sides.
- GW: The thing is that war has families on each side and nobody really comes out of it smelling of roses whatever happens.
- VO: There's a part of the opera for example, where a woman is singing, "have you seen my son?" She imagines someone, a woman walking along the road asking that question, but when the question's asked the line is actually in Turkish. It's a symbolic thing, but it's a touch of realism in a completely non-realistic play. I think the instrumentation that Ross has hit on to convey this is extremely interesting and exciting too.
- GW: When I talked to him last week, that was part of what intrigued me and it brought back the things we mentioned, like people like **Kurt Weill** and **Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale*** that pulls in a smaller instrumentation but quirky and intriguing and distinctive.
- VO: Yes, it's the same old topic, which war always is, but every story about war is an individual's story. And this is a group of individuals and men and women from a little town that we know. So we wanted it to be a chamber opera that has intimacy, we wanted this to be not a country going to war, so much as **Aro Street** going to war. We know we're not being historical, it's not history we're writing it's a musical and vocal presentation. For example there's a satirical character, a kind of New Zealand John Bull full of patriotic claptrap. We **know** that this is **exaggerating** the position of the time, because although there were reservations about war the country was ardent in our support of the Empire, so we know that there's a touch of satire that is in a sense non-historical, but it's not out of place in a general stage version of what happens in war.
- GW: No, well you only have to think of the various things that **were** very telling, like "Oh what a lovely war" and so on that the way people survived, be they in the trenches or be they back home, humour and resilience was extremely powerful and needed to be there.
- VO: You're dead right! And then part of regret and part of grief is always a certain amount of revisionary scepticism going on about it. So although at times we're cynical about war, or sceptical of official versions, we are never in the least bit so about the individuals or the events that touched both men and women.
- GW: This is based on a true situation but in the process of compiling the libretto, did you have access to letters, memoirs from the family?
- VO: I read Malone's own letters and the brilliant selection of interviews and so on by the historian **Jane Tolerton**, but in no sense was I directly drawing on those. For example, there are a couple of arias there when the men write letters to their wives, but instead of taking **real** letters of the time, or Malone's own words, we made them up because it's quite clear this is **not** an historical attempt at accuracy, this is a **staged** version. The **sentiment** of the letters is right, but I'd feel uneasy about using them directly because those men and those women penned their words in a personal way, so what we do is a

fabrication. After all, theatre basically is saying “let’s dress up and pretend!”, which is a very different thing from saying “let’s directly impersonate”.

GW: And that’s a fine line and I know from knowing lots of your previous works how adept you both are at treading that fine line and making something that’s memorable. But people have preconceptions when someone says “opera”, everyone has a different preconception of what they think opera is.

VO: Exactly.

GW: But I think the most important thing is that it communicates very directly and utilises the best of drama, the best of music, the best of words, and pulling all those strands together is what makes opera so special.

VO: That’s the luck too we have of being opera, and able to use dancers. You can’t talk about Chunuk Bair and Gallipoli without the actual business of fighting a battle, but of course the minute you try and represent that on stage at any degree of realism it quite rightly falls over and looks like a school pantomime, it just won’t work. And to do it through dance and with the really splendid music that Ross has written for that section I think it gets a lot of the *nerve-wracking* quality of war suggested without us saying “here we are dressed up pretending to die!”

GW: That sounds very exciting. So one of the things I did want to ask, how poetic is the score? Have you set some of the pieces as if they are lines not just poetry, but the lines set so that they have a metre and a movement like poetry?

VO: I’m often using a four stress line, say. There is rhyme because rhyme’s always good for an audience to hang onto, I think, and is something to pull them back and to remind them this isn’t just speech going on but it’s a construction. It’s the coathanger that the emotion hangs on.

GW: Absolutely!

VO: But I’m also very aware that writing a song is very different from writing a poem, because a poem is a thing that one hopes is complete in itself, it’s end-stopped. With the words for a song, or the words I’m writing, that’s only *towards* what it is going to finally be and it’s not a song until the composer’s finished with it. Until then, it’s something that is offered as a possibility of a song.

GW: This is the thing that people often don’t understand, the metre of poetry doesn’t automatically directly fit the metre that’s required if you’re setting it to music.

VO: I’ve tried to keep the register, the actual language of the libretto very close to ordinary speech and ordinary language because you can’t go getting arty about war –

GW: That’s right, it’s got to fit the vernacular, it’s got to have grittiness, it’s got to have real, reality and, and a natural feel.

VO: You're dead right! And so you can do that but at the same time use the traditional poetic devices of scansion and rhyme and so on to particular effects which it seems to me work all the better for having them or using them with straightforward, everyday language that these men and women would use. I also wanted them at times to be singing everyday prose. It's the colloquialism that keeps the language anchored into the war we know, but at the same time it's the form it's set out in that gives it a freedom that the composer can then utilise as he wants to.

GW: Your characters have to be believable and nothing stands out obviously badly if someone is speaking in a way that's stilted, and unrealistic. But I know that you guys have had such a lot of experience and have set English in all sorts of combinations really very successfully which is great.

Are there a few final thoughts or words that you wanted to say about the piece, a sort of closing statement, if you like?

VO: We've now done several pieces relating to war and the next commission we've got is a co-commission by the **Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra** and the **BBC Symphony** which goes into post-war trauma with physical injury, so I suppose overall we've tried to come at the war with a range of possible approaches and emotions. In the opera I think it's important that we did want it to be a Wellington story, which means of course it couldn't help but be a New Zealand story as well. But we wanted to do justice to individuals without falling for something like a ... I hate that word "**celebrate**", you know? It's nothing to do with celebration at all! It's like when you go to a funeral and whoever's taking it says "we're here to celebrate the life of ...". I don't think so, we're there to mourn the death of.

And I suppose you can say there's one over-riding metaphor, the title, *Brass Poppies*, that I took from some stunning work by the Dunedin artist and sculptor, **Stephen Mulqueen**. He took .303 brass cartridge cases, standard issue at Gallipoli, and fashioned them into beautiful metal poppies. This struck me as a lovely metaphor of what the opera and its music is trying to do, trying to take the bullet of raw history and make it into a shape which, while never forgetting what it was, now takes you to an unexpected place where the bullet itself never was.

GW: They'll see the brass, they'll see the poppies and think, this is something flowering out of something tragic and awful.

VO: When peace-time happens that's what happens, you try and do that with the past but there's the awful fact always, it could never have been anything but a bullet for the people involved.

GW: Thank you so much for your time. It's great to talk to you.

VO: Thank you for your sympathetic ear and interesting questions.

Footnotes to Interviews

Footnote 1 Brass Poppies Stephen Mulqueen

The poppies have grown out of my travels, curiosity, workshop practice and several years of refining. As an artist working in the early 21st century, ideas about memory, and how we remember and commemorate are important to me.

As we move towards the centenary of the Great War (1914/18 – 2014/18) **Poppies of War & Peace** offers a very real connection to the collective memory of the human carnage that scarred so much of the world during the 20th century. The brass cartridge poppy lies at the heart of current social debate, and offers a space for reflection on the causes and consequences of war as people all over the globe continue to experience it daily.

The Irish historian R. F. Foster states, "We make history by remembering things". I believe that we can



Stephen Mulqueen with 2 examples of his Brass Poppies

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also engage memory by making things which offer a very tangible link to our own relationships with the past, with each other, and with the possibilities for the future.

Stephen Mulqueen
January 2011

Poppies of War & Peace presents a commemorative poppy crafted from the debris of war. I transform a brass cartridge shell into a personalised wearable object.

"The dead then are the cartridge empties of today..."

Footnote 2 Requiem for The Fallen Premiere performance

Performed by Richard Greager (tenor), Horomona Horo (taonga pūoro), Ross Harris (bass drum), The New Zealand String Quartet [Helene Pohl (violin), Douglas Beilman (violin), Gillian Ansell (viola), Rolf Gjelsten

(cello)], and **Voices NZ Chamber Choir (SATB)** directed by **Karen Grylls**.

Director **Jonathan Alver**.

Performed at Wellington Cathedral of St Paul as part of the **New Zealand Festival** in 2014.

It was also subsequently very successfully presented as part of the **Arts Festival Dunedin** in Dunedin later that year and at **The Auckland Arts Festival** in Auckland in 2015 with all of the original performance team.

Footnote 3

About the Gallipoli Symphony

The story of the Gallipoli campaign is everlasting. It is a story of endeavour, courage, tragedy, great achievements and great sacrifices. It is a story of young nations and old coming together in conflict. It is, most of all a human story, of the spectrum of human emotions. This story is woven into the fabric of Australia, New Zealand and Turkey. Millions of words have been written about the campaign, but the story has never been 'narrated' musically, until now.

The Gallipoli Symphony is a major composition produced by internationally respected composers from Australia, New Zealand and Turkey. It represents the first time ever that eleven acclaimed composers from three nations that fought in the campaign have collaborated on a single commemorative work of this scale.

The Gallipoli story was structured into parts, like chapters in a book, each themed around an element of the campaign and assigned to a composer to create a work based on that theme.

Gelibolu

Omar Faruk Tekbilek (Turkey)

He Poroporaoki (Farewell)

Gareth Farr and Richard Nunn
(New Zealand)

The Voyage

Graeme Koehne AO (Australia)

Thoughts of Home

Peter Sculthorpe AO OBE (Australia)

The Landing

Elena Kats-Chernin (Australia)

The Invasion

Kamran Ince (Turkey)

God Pity Us Poor Soldiers

Ross Harris (New Zealand)

The August Offensive

Andrew Schultz (Australia)

The Trenches Are Empty Now

Ross Edwards (Australia)

Hope of the Higher Heart

Demir Demirkan (Turkey)

Future

Graeme Koehne AO (Australia)

Every year since 2006 a movement of the Symphony has been presented at Gallipoli. Leading classical and traditional musicians engaged from Turkey, Australia and New Zealand, augmented by musicians drawn from the Australian and New Zealand military bands performed a piece of The Gallipoli Symphony in the early hours of 25 April for the thousands of attendees awaiting the Dawn Service.

After ten years in the making, The Gallipoli Symphony was performed for the world in 2015.

The Gallipoli Symphony creates an important legacy. It tells the story of the Gallipoli campaign through music; reminding us of the horror and the heartache and carrying a message of hope, peace, friendship and collaboration between nations.