



Left to right: Tim, Lynette and Tom Wilkinson



Hitting the right note

Matt Shand | Journalist

The Wilkinsons are a family of doctors who have orchestrated their love of music into a symphony of healing sound for New Zealand.

For the past 11 years Tim Wilkinson has been organising the New Zealand Doctors Orchestra, putting on concerts across New Zealand and giving doctors a much-needed creative outlet and a chance to swap medical instruments for musical ones.

"I play the double bass, my wife Lynette plays the violin, and our son Tom plays the trumpet," Tim said.

"We started the New Zealand Doctors Orchestra after being part of the Christchurch Artist Doctor Concert and wanted to see if there were enough players across New Zealand.

"It turns out a lot of doctors are very talented musicians. Our soloist this year, Louise Webster, won a national concerto competition. We have a mix of those that played professionally before becoming doctors and some that played a long time ago and want to pick it up again."

The Orchestra's first concert was held in Nelson and it sold out with all proceeds going to the local hospice. Since then, they have travelled around the country putting on shows once a year and raised more than \$61,000 in donations for various hospice around New Zealand.



The logistics of organising 60 to 70 musicians every year and a time when everyone's schedules will be free is a challenge for Tim. He combats this by doing the rehearsal, the conducting and concert all on one weekend of the year.

"We look for a space with good rehearsal facilities and work around that," Tim said. "It's hard, as we must select the orchestra and we have started to have a bit of a wait list. We're lucky in that people self-select when they are available, and everyone knows we give priority to those that missed out last year."

"The music breaks down barriers between people and helps remove some of the hierarchy from our profession. We can have medical students playing next to senior surgeons and sharing knowledge."

"We meet up one weekend, begin practicing immediately with the conductor, have a dinner on the Saturday night and put the concert on Sunday afternoon. It's always great to see the mix of people attending. It gives people a nudge to play instruments again and meet people they didn't know before."

Lynette says the "crazy idea of Tim's" swept the whole family along with it but their passion for music is shared by many in the medical profession and it is needed to help cope with the day-to-day stresses of the job.

"I picked up my violin again in my forties," she said. "I guess I needed something creative and something completely different to medicine. I think it was for my personal wellbeing and work-life balance. Music is an important gateway for that."

"I look forward to meeting people at the weekend practices and old friends who have been coming along for years. It's great to have this shared purpose

and most people are too busy to talk shop. It's all about music.

"The music breaks down barriers between people and helps remove some of the hierarchy from our profession. We can have medical students playing next to senior surgeons and sharing knowledge. We are all working together to achieve the same goal."

Harpist Vanessa Souter says the orchestra is a great way for doctors to support other doctors.

Souter had a lengthy career as a professional harpist in Australia before studying medicine. She has played the harp for more than 40 years now. She was inspired to study medicine by her late husband.

"Music is a powerful thing," she said. "It expresses emotions and connects us all. As doctors we all see a particular amount of grief and we deal with people suffering. You need a creative outlet and a way to ground yourself. At a time when New Zealand doctors are doing it tough it is great to be able to look forward to and rehearse for the concert. Everyone plays together and, when playing music, if you make a mistake no one dies."

"Tim is a bit of a legend for organising us all and giving us that."



Doctor's Orchestra in 2023

In 2023 the NZDO will be in New Plymouth 20-23 July, 2023. Mark Hodgkinson will be the conductor and the repertoire will include Shostakovich's Symphony No 5. Organisers are adding an extra day for rehearsals (so, starting on the Thursday) to allow more time to work on the symphony. Enrolments open in February. If you are interested in finding out more visit www.nzdo.org.nz or email enquiries@nzdo.org.nz.

A little bit of a problem

Annual Conference gets stuck in to the big issues for health

