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NZ Doctors' Orchestra applies surgical precision to musical score

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A musical medical family: Tim Wilkinson with wife Lynette Murdoch and their son Tom Wilkinson

"I play in a few amateur orchestras, and in the NZDO everyone's really focused. They don't lose concentration. I think it's because they're doctors"

Medical musicians will swap surgery for the stage next month at the annual New Zealand Doctors' Orchestra concert.

The orchestra was started by one half of Christchurch musical medical couple, clinical geriatrician Tim Wilkinson.

His wife, Ferry Rd Medical GP Lynette Murdoch, is a founding member and their registrar son Tom Wilkinson plays trumpet in the orchestra.

Dr Wilkinson plays the double base, Dr Murdoch the violin. Both teach at the University of Otago, Christchurch.

Though Dr Wilkinson says they met through medicine, it was their shared interest in music that helped fine-tune the relationship.

Dr Wilkinson has played with the Christchurch Doctors' Orchestra for 25 years and on learning there was an Australian Doctors' Orchestra and a European one, he decided New Zealand needed the same.

Medical doctors of all stripes, including a good cohort of GPs, came together from all over the country for their first performance with the New Zealand Doctors' Orchestra in 2012.

The orchestra has gone on to perform once a year ever since.

This year's concert will be held at the Napier Municipal Theatre in the Hawke's Bay on 24 June.

Modelled on overseas orchestras

The concert weekend follows a strict format, modelled on overseas doctor orchestras.

Practice starts late on Friday morning and goes to 9pm, (with breaks) before starting again on Saturday, with a group dinner that night, and a final practice on Sunday morning before the afternoon concert.

The doctors cover all costs, enabling them to donate ticket sale proceeds to a hospice in the same area.

Last year they raised \$6900.

“It’s really fun,” Dr Wilkinson says.

“I play in a few amateur orchestras, and in the NZDO everyone’s really focused.

They don’t lose concentration. I think it’s because they’re doctors.

“I don’t know what it is about medicine, but it attracts very capable musicians.”

He points out that the NZDO’s soloist this year used to be a professional cellist in Europe and is now at medical school.

Others in the orchestra also play as professional musicians.

The NZDO is always interested in new players. Go to www.nzdo.org.nz for more details.