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Taking words to a new place

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The word and the note are meeting halfway in a collaborative arts event, writes Tom McKinlay.

Poetry is donning its best bib and tucker for the Dunedin Fringe Festival, metaphorically speaking.

It's slipping into classical shoes for a collaboration between some of the city's finest word-workers and their musical counterparts. Figuratively.

The occasion, *All Good Poems Wear Classical Shoes*, on Wednesday, brings together poets David Eggleton, Emma Neale, Sue Wootton and Ian Loughran with composers Anthony Ritchie, Jeremy Mayall and Sam van Betuw, the latter group setting the poetry of the former to music.

On the night, the words by those talented poets will be sung by soprano Sophie Morris to piano accompaniment provided by Ritchie and van Betuw.

The challenge in all this was principally with the composers, the poems having already been penned.

But they were up for it, event organiser Loughran says.

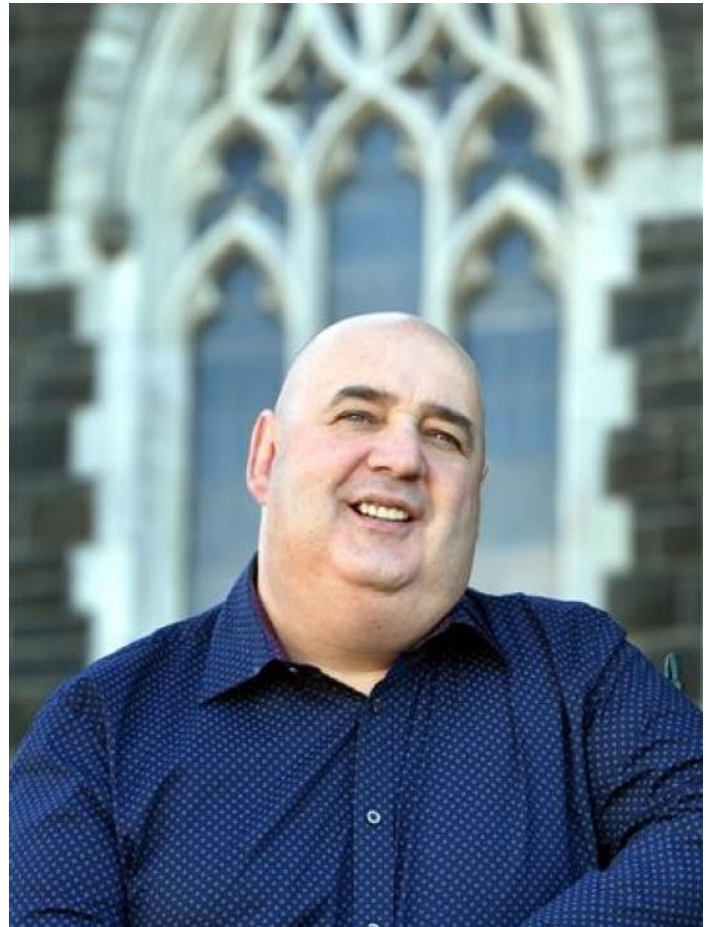
"Composers love to do new things," he says with some certainty in his lyrical northern accent, "and they saw this as something new and exciting to do. These works are going to be premiered for the first time anywhere on that Wednesday night in Dunedin, so it is quite exciting."

The process involved sending a selection of a dozen poems from each poet to the composers and asking them to choose one to set to music.

Mayall chose two.

For Loughran, Wednesday's show is both a sequel to last year's fringe show *All Good Poems Wear Travelling Shoes* and a further extension of his fortnightly Otago Access Radio show of the same name.

But it does raise the question, why put poems to music at all? Are they not sufficient?



Ian Loughran outside Knox Church, the venue for the show. Photo: Peter McIntosh



Emma Neale: Good poetry is writing that "calls on all the senses" Photo by Jane Dawber.

"Well, I am a poet myself. I am one of the featured poets in the show also," Loughran explains.

"I love the power of the word and what the word can convey but for me there's an extra process beyond the the written word, which is the whole concept of the 'travelling shoe', the shoe concept," he says.

"It is moving. There is what the poet intended and then there's what goes on from there. Sometimes it is just the reader or how the poet reads it. But if you add an extra dimension such as music it is mining those words for extra depth and extra richness."

Exploring where the written work might be taken is the adventure, he says.

"When you are working with very talented people, and there are some fantastic musical scores that have been done for these poems, and Sophie singing them, it's fabulous, it sounds fantastic."

Anthony Ritchie, an associate professor in the University of Otago department of music, is one of the country's most prolific composers, many of his works having been performed internationally.

Enthusiastic "creative collaborator" Jeremy Mayall was the University of Otago Mozart Fellow for 2014-15.

Bayfield High School and University of Otago-educated Sam van Betuw was last year a finalist in the NZSO Todd Corporation Young Composers Award.

Poet, playwright, stand-up comedian and broadcaster Loughran's poets are equally accomplished, *Landfall* editor Eggleton, Neale and Wootton all being former Burns Fellows.

Last year's "travelling shoes" show married poetry with more traditional, melody-focused, song structures.



