

CASE STUDY

AN INVITATION TO TEST DRIVE THE ARTS

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In 2007 Creative New Zealand set up a pilot Test Drive the Arts scheme to run over one year. Their program supports the infrastructure set-up and human resourcing for four companies including Christchurch Symphony, The Court Theatre, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra and the Auckland Theatre Company to put a target of 5000 people through the Test Drive the Arts scheme. This case study provides an overview of the program with insights from Auckland Theatre Company and Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra into some of the challenges, highlights and results to date from the pilot.

Overview Test Drive the Arts: an introduction

Selling cars and selling tickets to an arts experience – a concert, play, exhibition, book reading or ballet performance – might seem like incompatible activities. But a canny British arts marketer, Andrew McIntyre, has put the two together and come up with Test Drive the Arts. It's a scheme that's been introducing new audiences to the arts in Britain – and now in New Zealand.

“It's a simple concept that goes like this: you wouldn't buy a car without test driving it first (or a pair of shoes, for that matter) so why do we expect non-arts attenders to take a punt on the arts?”

Andrew McIntyre, Co-director of [Morris Hargreaves McIntyre](#) says:

“A lot of people are interested in the arts but for various reasons, they never get around to buying a ticket and going. Test Drive the Arts is a personal invitation to come to an arts event as our guest and see what the arts can offer.

“We then ask them to provide feedback about the experience – from parking and programme notes to the actual performance. The next step is to encourage them to return by providing follow-up offers and building a relationship with them so they become life-time arts attenders.”

Attractive posters, brochures, advertisements and subscription schemes do a good job of reaching existing audiences. But they don't persuade non-attenders to become attenders.

In Britain, Test Drive the Arts is filling empty seats with new audiences and making money for arts organisations. For example, the [Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra](#) has run the scheme for four years and has increased its audience by 44 per cent. Over that time, 12,000

people have attended a concert through Test Drive the Arts and more than 4000 have come back and paid full price.

Creative New Zealand: a pilot scheme

A key finding in Creative New Zealand research, published in [*New Zealanders and the arts: attitudes, attendance and participation in 2005*](#), shows that 84% of “low attendees” (people who seldom go to an arts event) are interested in the arts even though they don’t go much.

This finding was the trigger that prompted [Creative New Zealand](#) to invite Andrew McIntyre to New Zealand in late 2006 and present the Test Drive the Arts scheme to arts marketers.

Subsequently, Creative New Zealand set up a pilot Test Drive the Arts scheme to run over one year. It invited its recurrently funded organisations (arts organisations funded on an annual or multi-year basis) to apply for seed funding to undertake the pilot. The funding was to support infrastructure set-up and human resourcing.

Four companies were selected:

[Christchurch Symphony](#)
[The Court Theatre](#)
[Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra](#) and the
[Auckland Theatre Company](#)

The overriding goal was to put 5000 people through the Test Drive the Arts scheme.

Box-office analysis of the four pilot companies showed that combined, they had 50,000 empty seats in 2006.

Helen Bartle, National Adviser, Audience and Market Development, Creative New Zealand, says:

“Typically, performing arts organisations budget at around 60% to 70% of the house and aim to fill two-thirds of their capacity. But what about the other third? Test Drive is about being strategic and using these empty seats to build new audiences. It’s a bit like a dating agency. You’re connecting a person with an empty theatre seat. If they get on well, it could become a life-time partnership.”

Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra and Auckland Theatre Company worked together throughout 2007, sharing resources such as databases and good practice. Similarly, the two Christchurch companies have been working together although their projects were launched in mid 2007 and will not be completed until June 2008.

This case study provides insights from Auckland Theatre Company and Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra into some of the challenges and highlights of running the pilot. It also presents these companies’ results to date. Creative New Zealand will publish a final report containing case studies on all four companies when The Court Theatre and Christchurch Symphony’s pilots are completed in mid 2008.

How the scheme works

Although each company's approach varies to suit the particular requirements of its artform and the local population, there are three essential elements each project shares.

1. It introduces people to something in the arts (e.g. a concert or a play) for the first time.
2. It provides an incentive (e.g. complimentary tickets, discounted tickets, value-adds such as free drinks) for people to participate in an arts event.
3. There are planned follow-ups (e.g. e-communications and special offers) to encourage test drivers to become long-term audience members.

Helen Bartle says:

"Not attending arts events can be habit-forming but Test Drive the Arts cuts through that inertia by explaining the artform, and creating excitement and anticipation."

A key factor in achieving success with the scheme is to ensure you attract as many people as possible to your first offer. Let's say you invite non-attenders to a concert and offer them two complimentary tickets. Once they've attended the concert and filled out a feedback form, you follow this up with a second offer (e.g. discounted tickets). In the third offer, they pay the full price of the tickets but they are value-added (e.g. two complimentary glasses of wine, the opportunity to meet the musicians after the performance). In your final offer, you can take them even further up the loyalty ladder and invite them to become a season's ticket holder or subscriber with a special subscription offer (e.g. four concerts for \$100 instead of \$200). By the end of the season, these new audience members may have become some of your most loyal and frequent attenders.

"Ninety per cent of people offered complimentary tickets say 'yes' and turn up to the show. That's the easy part. What you need to do is focus your efforts on retaining these people as committed audience members."

Another success factor of the scheme is to make the arts experience as non-threatening as possible for participants: for example, by sending them helpful information sheets about things such as where to park and eat, what to do when you get to the theatre and why you need to turn off your cell phones.

Even more importantly, the product you're offering your test drivers needs to be accessible. A challenging or obscure play, for instance, is likely to confirm all their preconceptions that theatre is not for them.

Helen Bartle says:

"It's also important to give your test drivers the best possible seats. Their first impressions of you are key to them returning. Tell them they'll be getting the best available seats in the house because it will make them feel special and enhance their experience.

"There's no shortage of people wanting to take the arts for a test drive. They're on every street corner and at every bus stop. Ninety per cent of people offered complimentary tickets say 'yes' and turn up to the show. That's the easy part. What you need to do is focus your efforts on retaining these people as committed audience members."

Research in Britain shows that organisations using Test Drive the Arts as part of their marketing mix are getting very positive results. Andrew McIntyre says:

"It's basically a third, a third, a third. One-third of people come back very quickly and pay. One-third say they really enjoyed the events and say they will come back but they may not get

to another event for a year or two. And then the final third will say, 'Thanks very much but it's not quite my thing'."

The case studies: Auckland Theatre Company and Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra

Introduction

The two Auckland companies shared database information and human resources to develop and implement their projects. In January 2007, both companies [sent a letter](#) and sign-up forms to music and drama heads of department in 750 secondary schools throughout the Auckland region.

Both companies set a target of 1000 people registering to become test drivers – a target that was exceeded when 1604 people responded to the mailout and signed up. Of these, 892 wanted complimentary tickets to both companies; 508 wanted only ATC tickets; and 144 wanted only APO tickets. In January 2008, as part of the collaboration, each company will swap lists and re-approach those people who had opted not to attend its performances in 2007.

Although both companies use ticketing agency [Ticketek](#) for ticket sales, they used their own in-house box office for the pilot. This meant they could collect data more easily and could waive barriers for first-time attenders such as booking fees for the pilot.

Stuart Angel, Test Drive the Arts Co-ordinator for Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, says:

"The biggest benefit of the partnership was having to make the time to talk to others in the industry and bounce ideas off them. When the take-up of the second offer was lower than expected for both of us, it was great to be able to discuss what we were doing and change tactics. It was also valuable talking to someone from another artform with different demographics and programming."

Auckland Theatre Company

Test Drive the Arts: the funk and jargon

Auckland Theatre Company's project, initiated in February 2007, consisted of four offers – starting out with two complimentary tickets to a show and culminating in participants paying the full price for tickets and, potentially, becoming Auckland Theatre Company (ATC) season ticket holders.

The company's Audience Development Co-ordinator, Rachel Chin, reels off a list of tasks required to implement the first offer: entering the test drivers in a database; contacting them via email and offering them a choice of dates over the 2007 season's seven shows; processing their requests; sending them an e-receipt, posting their tickets and an [information sheet](#); sending them an [e-survey](#) after the show; and then getting the [second offer](#) under way for those who responded to the e-survey.

Rachel Chin says:

"Sure, it was labour-intensive at times – particularly in the lead-up to a show opening and then in the first two weeks of the season when test drivers were able to book seats. Outside of this period, our email and electronic surveying services supported us to deliver the necessary communications and gather data."

ATC used Message Media, a New Zealand Post group company, to provide data gathering and email messaging services. Set-up costs involved in creating a system for the theatre company included trialing and training in the software; copy-proofing survey questions; and giving unique IDs to each test driver. On the first Tuesday or Friday after test drivers had attended a show, they were emailed a survey. A week later, reminder emails were sent out if they hadn't responded. After the second reminder, those who didn't respond were dropped.

In 2007, ATC spent approximately \$13,700 developing and implementing Test Drive the Arts. Of this, approximately \$9000 covered the cost of labour and the remainder covered infrastructure costs such as building the technology and consumables such as postage, stationery and ink cartridges. Creative New Zealand's seed funding was \$12,000.

Rachel says:

"Recruiting new audiences will always incur more cost and dedication of time but in the long-term, we hope it's worth it. This project recognises that audience development is about introducing new people to our works. It uses today's spare ticket capacity to secure tomorrow's audiences."

“When the two companies contacted participants to make the first offer, they were excited about the ‘whole funk and jargon’ of Test Drive the Arts.”

"The concept is easy to grasp and participants understood what was involved straight away. It was a chance for them to try an ATC show without any financial risks and with our support."

Project targets and results

The initial target was to get 1000 people responding to the recruitment mailout in order to test drive:

- 833 people through offer one
- 277 people through offer two
- 92 people through offer three.

By the end of the pilot, 568 test drivers had taken up the first offer (equating to 1136 spare seats). Only 22 test drivers responded to the second offer (equating to 40 seats, worth \$1848). This low percentage continued with only 22.7% taking up the third offer (equating to seven tickets purchased at a value of \$330). ATC has made the fourth offer to all test drivers who took up the first offer.

The offers	Offer details	No. invited	No. responded	No. of tickets	% response	\$ value
The invitation	Letter to teachers inviting them to sign up for offer one	750 schools	148 schools	1604 teachers signed up	19.7% of schools	N/A
Offer one	2 comp. ATC tickets	940	568	1136	60.4%	-
Offer two	- 4 for 2 - 2 for 1 - 2 for 1 for any of the last 3 shows	452	22	40	4.9%	\$1848
Offer three	Buy 2 or more tickets and get 2 comp. drink vouchers	22	5	11	22.7%	\$330
Offer four	2008 ATC Season Brochure	504	By 30 Nov, 89 had opted to receive brochure	N/A	17.7%	-
Total						\$2178

Key quantitative findings

Of the 568 participants who joined ATC's offer one, 504 participants (88.7%) were sent a final evaluation survey about the pilot to complete. As of 30 November 2007, 30.8% of the participants had given feedback (155 participants).

"Recruiting new audiences will always incur more cost and dedication of time but in the long-term, we hope it's worth it."

When asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement "Because of my participation in Test Drive The Arts, my interest in Auckland Theatre Company shows has increased in a positive manner", 94.8% (147 respondents) of all 155 respondents agreed with the statement. Of the 147 respondents who agreed, 42.2% (62 respondents) said they "strongly agreed".

Of the 155 respondents:

- 96.1 % (149 respondents) said that they had "enjoyed" the experience of attending
- 91.6 % (142 respondents) had recommended the experience to friends, relatives or colleagues
- 79.4% (123 respondents) said the experience had made them more likely to attend again in the future
- 17.4% (27 respondents) said the experience made no difference to their likelihood of returning
- 3.2% (5 respondents) said the experience made them less likely to return
- 93% (144 respondents) had been made a subsequent offer
- 27.1% (42 respondents) indicated they had taken up a subsequent Test Drive offer. Of these, 38.1% (16 respondents) indicated they had spent less than \$50 on ATC tickets, 50% (21 respondents) had spent \$51 – \$100, 9.5% (4 respondents) spent \$101 – \$150 and 2.4% (1 respondent) had spent \$151 – \$200 on ATC tickets
- 16.1% (25 respondents) indicated they had attended again without a subsequent Test Drive offer. Of these, 48% (12 respondents) indicated they spent less than \$50 on ATC tickets, 36% (9 respondents) spent \$51 – \$100, 12% (3 respondents) spent \$101 – \$150 and 4% (1 respondent) spent \$151-200 on ATC tickets.

In total:

- 43.2% (67 respondents) of all 155 respondents indicated they had re-attended since their first Test Drive experience.

Finally, respondents were asked whether ATC should continue to introduce new people to its shows via its Test Drive the Arts programme. All but three of the 155 respondents (98.1%) said "Yes".

Rachel says:

"We achieved the one-third return with the first offer, which compares with the results being achieved offshore. But the figures have been much lower than expected in the second and third offers.

"Nearly 90% of the test drivers who sent in the survey after offer one indicated they would like to continue the test drive experience throughout the year. However, when they were contacted with subsequent test drive offers, their positive response at the start of the project wasn't reflected in the second and third offers."

Michael Adams says it's hard to know why people didn't return for the second offer. Was it because they didn't like the second-offer package? Was it because they didn't want to go to any of the shows on offer? Or did they feel they didn't need supporting any further?

"I have a sneaking suspicion that teachers may be more intrepid people than the general public: that is, once they had tried Auckland Theatre Company, they were willing to buy tickets independently. In the future, I would be interested to see if a general population cohort took up more of the offers before moving up the ladder to buying tickets as a general public buyer.

"If we continue with Test Drive the Arts, we will try to attract a more random group of people so we can assess whether the scheme is better used with a highly defined and targeted population, such as teachers, or if it would be more useful to spread a wide net over a random catchment of non-attenders, similar to The Court Theatre's approach in the UK."

What was learned

Key learnings include:

- Contact with a real person at ATC broke the ice for test drivers and set the relationship on a good footing.
- Test drivers need three to five weeks' notice of an upcoming offer.
- Giving a choice of offers (two is optimum) at offer two will help you recruit more people.
- Putting a deadline on the offer will increase response rates.
- Early investment in email and electronic surveying equipment saves a lot of time.
- Some test drivers will become independent theatre-goers after the first experience, opting to buy their own tickets from the box office.
- Test Drive the Arts looks to the future, using today's spare capacity to secure tomorrow's audiences.

"We need...to keep our offers fairly straightforward."

What next?

If ATC decides to continue using Test Drive the Arts in 2008, it will make the scheme as streamlined as possible so that it is less draining on staff time.

Michael says:

"Most of our audience development strategy has been with the under-25s. Test Drive the Arts is part of our push to attract the mid thirties to mid forties age group, bringing lapsed attenders into the fold.

"We've learned a lot about what works and doesn't work. Two key things we've learned are that we need to give people plenty of time to select their choice of shows and dates, and also to keep our offers fairly straightforward."

Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra

"I wished I could have seen them all"

"I had the wonderful opportunity to get asked if I would like to see the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra. I was very apprehensive at first, not knowing what to expect. Right from the beginning I absolutely loved it. I was very moved, I was on an emotional roller coaster from goose bumps to tears, but in a positive way. I was disappointed when it finished and couldn't wait for the next time I could see them. "Since then, I have booked twice and can't wait for *Splendour of the Baroque* on the 22 November, which came highly recommended to me although the choice was very difficult, not having any education at all in classical music. I wished I could have seen them all."

This was just one of the huge numbers of positive comments received by the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra (APO) in the [feedback survey](#) completed by test drivers who took up the first offer of two complimentary tickets to the concert *Show Stoppers*.

Comments such as this are heart-warming and make all the hard work worthwhile, says Stuart Angel, APO Test Drive the Arts co-ordinator.

Keeping track of test drivers

Initially, the scheme was run by staff within the APO's marketing and ticketing department but by March, it was clear that the additional workload wasn't sustainable. A part-time Test Drive the Arts co-ordinator was appointed and Stuart estimates that he has spent two days a week administering it.

For him, the main challenge in driving the pilot for the APO is one of logistics: making sure all the information is logged carefully, and keeping track of the test drivers and the different stages they are at in the scheme.

"We rely heavily on technology to ensure we can manage and track all test drivers at each stage of the cycle. At the initial planning stages, it's absolutely vital that you work out how you're going to capture the data you need and manage the whole process."

Technology used by APO includes:

- Excel to record the data at each stage
- Email-merging technology to reach large numbers of people efficiently
- Smart e-mail software to send out feedback forms, and then collate and analyse the data
- PatronBase software to track and analyse ticket bookings at each stage and, at a later stage, the income generated.

By 30 November 2007, the APO had spent approximately \$29,000 developing and implementing Test Drive the Arts. Creative New Zealand's seed funding of \$25,000 enabled the orchestra to employ a part-time co-ordinator to administer the scheme.

Project targets and results to date

The initial target was to get 1000 people responding to the recruitment mailout in order to test drive:

- 750 people through offer one
- 250 people through offer two
- 83 people through offer three.

Of the 1604 teachers (exceeding the target by 60%) who responded to the mailout to test drive an APO and/or ATC event, 1222 respondents said they had never attended an APO concert.

By 30 November 2007, the APO was part-way through [offer two](#) and had yet to introduce offer three. At this stage, 602 of its test drivers (1225 tickets) had taken up the first offer to an APO concert, where they were invited to attend one of three concerts in the Vero Aotea Series. This concert series was chosen because the music is accessible for those new to orchestral concerts.

Feedback from the surveys completed by test drivers after they had attended a first-offer concert reveals:

- 99.6% would recommend the APO to others
- A rating of 8.7 out of ten for the overall experience.

When asked how much they would be prepared to pay to attend an APO concert, there was a range of responses that suggest current prices for an APO concert (from \$35 for a single ticket or from \$20 for subscription tickets) are in tune with what audiences are willing to pay.

By 30 November 2007, 37 test drivers (110 tickets) had taken up offer two, generating income of \$2915. Stuart Angel expects that these figures will increase when test drivers take up offer two bookings for concerts in February 2008.

Analysis of offer two shows that 57% of the test drivers taking up this offer opted for *Show Stoppers* over the *Splendour of the Baroque* and *Rhapsody in Blue* concerts. This indicates that the way to build an audience for orchestral music is to start by introducing test drivers to lighter orchestral works.

As with the other companies, the response rate to APO's second and third offers falls a long way short of the one-third, one-third, one-third pattern of test drivers in Britain.

Stuart Angel says:

"We can't compare ourselves to Britain because the environments are different. We have to set realistic targets for Auckland because we're not going to get one-third of our test drivers become long-term supporters."

What was learned

The APO presents 40 concerts a year. That's an average of three or four concerts a month, each one presenting different repertoire. Like the Christchurch Symphony, the APO is more restricted than the theatre companies in the dates it can offer test drivers. On the other hand, its venues are bigger (the Auckland Town Hall seats 1500 and Aotea Centre seats capacity 2200) than the Auckland Theatre Company venues (Sky City Theatre seats 700 and Maidment Theatre seats 448).

Stuart Angel says that any company running Test Drive the Arts should factor the scheme into its programming so that accessible concerts are placed strategically to maintain interest for test drivers at each of the offers.

In addition to the [information sheet](#) sent to test drivers, along with their tickets and an [introductory letter](#), the APO set up an information booth at any of the concerts attended by test drivers. As well as having somewhere to go and ask questions before the concert, they also approached the booth after the concert to say thanks. "People really liked putting a face to a name and showing their appreciation. It's just one of the personal touches that makes them feel welcome and valued."

For Stuart, phone calls are useful "gentle prods".

"We've done a lot of calling. Emails are easy and good first ports of call about an offer. But phone calls are important for reminding people and they're very positive about the calls. If they don't take up the offer on the phone, then we back off. I've found that people don't like hard sell. If they want to take up an offer they will make up their own minds in their own time."

"Having said that, most of the bookings for offer two came in after the reminder phone calls so they are certainly worth doing."

In the end, he says, the most important benefit of the pilot is the long-term goodwill and positive public perception of the APO. "Going on people's comments, word about our concerts has been spreading like wildfire."

What next?

APO is set to continue Test Drive the Arts in 2008 and is hoping to engage with Pacific communities in Auckland. One of its staff members is of Pacific Island heritage and already acts as a liaison with Pacific communities.

Top tips from the pilot scheme

- Be time-savvy: drop non-responsive participants after two attempts to engage them, get test drivers to update their contact details before mailouts and use e-tools to increase efficiency.
- Be flexible: it's important to reduce barriers (e.g. no booking fees, a choice of shows and dates).
- Market your scheme to sectors that you don't already market to because you are much more likely to reach non-attenders.
- Don't overload people with information: keep it simple, succinct and user-friendly.
- Don't give away seats you can sell.
- Get buy-in from the whole organisation by talking to them about Test Drive the Arts, asking them for their support and knowledge, and sharing your findings with them.
- Be patient: make a long-term commitment to using the scheme in your marketing mix and don't expect to see immediate returns. It could take between three to five years before you get the results you're really looking for.

"We've done a lot of calling. Emails are easy and good first ports of call about an offer. But phone calls are important for reminding people..."

- Use phone calls as a way to communicate: it provides a personal touch and helps you learn more about your Test Drive audience.
- Factor Test Drive the Arts into the year's artistic programme so you can offer test drivers appropriate and appealing events at each stage.
- Build a steady, modest scheme that's manageable. But keep doing it, and keep refining and looking at ways to improve it.
- Remember that the bigger your initial group, the better the overall results. It's like sifting sand for a few nuggets of gold. Once fixed costs are taken into account, the extra work required to add additional test drivers is negligible.

Looking at the results to date

By 30 November 2007, a total of 3822 test drivers across the four companies had participated in the pilot scheme and experienced at least one concert or play. Of these, 321 (or 10%) have so far returned and paid for a ticket.

Helen Bartle says that given the relatively short timeframe of the pilot, 10% is an encouraging figure.

"What we're presenting here are only preliminary findings because the Auckland Theatre Company is the only organisation to have completed the pilot. This figure will undoubtedly increase over the next six months.

"We also have to remember that it took the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra four years to put 12,000 people through its scheme and convert 4000 of them into paying customers."

In addition, the results do not take into account the people who may have taken up the first offer and who then went on to buy tickets direct from Ticketek. Nor does it measure the life-time value of these new or "re-activated" people – those who may not attend again this year but are more likely to attend next year or the year after.

“Longer timeframes to run the projects would help organisations reach their targets and enable them to evaluate fully the impact of Test Drive.”

In early December 2007, the four companies presented their results to other arts organisations at a forum in Wellington. Helen Bartle says that these companies have become "agents of social change in arts marketing".

"They have become innovators and have showed incredible tenacity and ingenuity in their approaches over the past year. They have collaborated; learned how to work smarter and use technology to great advantage; and connected with their audiences in significant and meaningful ways.

"Innovations in audience development often mean that we need to make mistakes to acquire new knowledge. If we weren't able to experiment and learn from our mistakes, arts marketing in New Zealand would run the risk of remaining formulaic and increasingly ineffective."

Looking ahead: where now for Test Drive the Arts?

Test Drive the Arts is building momentum internationally as an audience development strategy. In mid 2007, for instance, Arts Queensland, the Australia Council for the Arts and 20 performing arts venues and companies throughout Queensland launched a collaborative Test Drive initiative.

In New Zealand, the four companies that pioneered the Creative New Zealand pilot in 2007 will be able to share their knowledge with other companies interested in using the scheme as part of their marketing mix.

In 2008, Creative New Zealand will be supporting two further New Zealand arts organisations to develop Test Drive the Arts as an audience development strategy.

Resources

For more information and to order a copy of the final report please contact Helen Bartle, National Adviser, Audience and Market Development, Creative New Zealand (T: +64 9 377 8750 E: helenb@creativenz.govt.nz).

- For more information about Auckland Theatre Company's pilot, please email Michael Adams, Marketing and Sponsorship Manager (michael@atc.co.nz).
- For more information about Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra's pilot, please email Stuart Angel, Fundraising Manager (stuarta@apo.co.nz).
- Arts About Manchester: a summary of its Test Drive: North West audience development project undertaken in 1998
http://www.newaudiences2.org.uk/downloads/testdrive_northwest.doc
- Queensland's Test Drive initiative, delivered online with hot offers, arts etiquette, FAQs and more <http://www.testdrivethearts.com/>
- [Test Drive tip sheet](#), compiled by Andrew McIntyre (Morris, Hargreaves, McIntyre).

About the author:

Iona McNaughton is a freelance writer and published children's author. She has a wide knowledge of the performing arts in New Zealand and is a keen audience member.