

SONGS – THE VOICE OF NZ YOUTH

by Roseanna Gamlen-Greene - Rangī Ruru Girls' School.



In the 1970's hardly any NZ music was played on the radio, but now it's different. Thanks to talented musicians such as Dave Dobbyn, Gin Wigmore, Bic Runga and Tiki Taane, New Zealanders are starting to really appreciate our own music. 'The Nature's Best' CD sold a phenomenal 150,000 copies in 2002, and perhaps that's when NZ music was really brought to the people. It marked a change in the way NZ music is viewed by the public. It is now considered relevant and a mirror of who we are. You will find there is a part of Kiwi culture ingrained in our own music which hits home for a lot of New Zealanders.

The reason we're hearing more NZ songwriters is because there are more avenues of expression to explore, and they now know that there is the support. This, like most things, starts at high school, where music is a big feature and influence on our lives in many ways. But the difference is we're now being encouraged to create our own music, and so the age of song writing has been born. Play It Strange is one of the major promoters and facilitators of this trend, providing more opportunities for youth development through the medium of music. A very commendable position indeed, both helping the NZ music industry expand and youth society to grow invaluable. NZQA has teamed up with Play It Strange so contemporary song writers are now recognized for their musical talent and can gain credits for NCEA, even when students aren't taking music as a subject. This is a big step in the way music is viewed in schools, as many more genres of music are now being respected.

My viewpoints arise from the way I've grown up. I currently live in Christchurch, I moved here when I was 13 years old and I'm now at Rangī Ruru Girls' School and currently in Year 13. However I'm originally from the West Coast of the South Island, which I consider to be my real home. I lived in a renovated coal miner's cottage amongst dense native bush, perched on the edge of a cliff above a wild coastline looking out to the Tasman Sea. This definitely made childhood memorable. I come from a broken home which I feel makes me more sure of what I want in life, making me a stronger person and is part of what drives me to achieve my goals. Much of my childhood history and memories serve as inspiration for the songs I write. I started song writing in 2008 thanks to the Play It Strange Schools Songwriting Competition, but when I was younger I always loved to make up songs on the piano by looking at pictures (Bugs Bunny cartoons were my favourite) and then I played what the picture made me feel like. I sing, play violin, guitar and piano; I suppose you'd call me musical. I'm very excited that my song 'Sunrise' was placed on the Play It Strange CD, because when I write I put so much of myself into my songs. It's a big step to show people my personal creativity in such a raw way. Consequently if your work of art is recognized and encouraged, it benefits you and not just your song writing. The Play It Strange Songwriting competition motivated me to write more songs and improve my musicianship and it has helped me grow as a person.

Writing songs shouldn't be something teenagers do locked up in their bedrooms. The music should be performed, showcased and developed at every opportunity. It is a pot of gold waiting to be discovered. We, the youth of today, have a right for our voices to be heard, so we can express ourselves and reach a wider audience. That is what makes the Play It Strange CD so superb, because there are 42 songs that are all incredibly unique, each telling a different story about the lives of New Zealanders. It is important that this music gets out into the world. Something else this competition has brought about for me personally is the chance to have my song performed live with string players from school which is very exciting and will hopefully encourage others to get involved in the craft of song writing.

When we're young we are not bound by the social restrictions of adulthood. We experience everything for the first time with raw clarity. Life experiences are fresh and personal and have so much impact. Youth doesn't have preformed reservations, and there's always an abundance of hope. But as we grow older this hope often gets crushed by cynical elders, who think they know how the world works. And so the cycle continues. But what I'm saying and what Play It Strange is saying, is that we can break that cycle. Not only can we make pure beautiful music full of truth and joy, but we can create a new generation of youth who continue with our goals in front of us with hope in our hearts, ready to take on and change the world.