

Working in harmony

Staff on Unitec's music programmes are not only teachers but active musicians and researchers. They talk to us about the range of research in music and how creating new work is at the centre of it all.



When your industry is changing faster than almost any other in the world, the scope for new and different work is almost limitless.

This is the case in the world of music, where the past 20 years have brought huge changes to the way music is performed, listened to, acquired, owned, marketed and managed.

Dr Glenda Keam, a senior lecturer in Te Pae Whanake, the Department of Community Development, which runs the two-year Diploma in Contemporary Music and the semester-long Certificate in Music, says staff and students alike are creating music in a very different environment to the one that existed 20 years ago. "The music industry has changed so fast and so completely with the digital revolution and musicians have had to become more versatile, adaptable and flexible to keep up. This is the same for students, who need to have a good understanding of all aspects of what it means to be a musician in these changing times."

Defining music research

Like many other creative industries, what constitutes research in contemporary music is a slightly harder question to answer than it may be in other areas, says Glenda. Traditionally-recognised research areas such as writing articles, presenting conference papers and editing books are just part of the mix. There are also the more specialised areas of composing music for other performers, writing songs and performing with other musicians, improvisatory performance, composing with computers and collaborative

creations such as film, dance and theatre music. Added to that are reviews of other people's music in written or radio formats, giving pre-concert talks, producing other musicians' work for live realisation and recording projects, running ensembles and developing new repertoire, and music publishing enterprises.

For Glenda, who is also President of the Composers Association of New Zealand, recent research projects have included co-editing a new book on New Zealand music and co-organising a festival of New Zealand music that will be held in Los Angeles next year. Other Unitec music staff have also had new work performed and presented at international workshops and festivals. "The essential ingredient of contemporary music research is high-quality work that has added to new knowledge. And it needs to be work with a high level of esteem, not just work that got played."

She says that while there are quality assurance challenges in all fields, the live performance areas of music, theatre and dance have particular issues, especially when it comes to new work. The ways of asserting quality assurance with a brand new piece would involve considerations such as whether it was commissioned, funded by Creative New Zealand, published, placed in a competition, and who played it and where. "If it has had lots of subsequent performances then this is not a new output but it is evidence of quality and peer esteem. So one piece of work can result in many different scenarios."

At home and away

Glenda says research, performance and the opportunities to travel overseas to international music festivals and conferences all help expand musical thinking, feed creativity, and put the New Zealand scene into context. Earlier this year she went to Zagreb as the New Zealand delegate to the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival. "I heard five days of music from all around the world and spent every morning in general assembly meetings with delegates from 50 countries talking about the music scenes in their countries."

Representing New Zealand on the world stage is a natural fit for Glenda, who has wide knowledge on the industry and the music. She recently released the book *Home, Land and Sea: Situating Music in Aotearoa New Zealand*, co-edited with writer Tony Mitchell. The book features chapters by a wide range of music experts including Glenda and Tama Waipara (also a member of the Unitec music teaching team). Glenda says as the first significant textbook on New Zealand music, it aims to comprehensively cover a wide range of musical styles and traditions. She says chapters on Māori and Pacific sounds are the first to pull all the information together in one publication and will be core resources for coursework.

"That's just another way that we as researchers and as teaching team members have worked together. Our research hasn't been going down a path just so we can follow our interests, but has resulted in a textbook that is being picked up by universities and polytechnics around New Zealand. We built a business case based on what we needed for our own teaching and our knowledge about what courses were taught around New Zealand and what the demand and needs might be."

Creating opportunities

Glenda, a musicologist, pianist and composer, joined Unitec in 2006 after 12 years lecturing in music at the University of Auckland. She believes the Unitec programmes offer students the chance to become well-rounded musicians before they take a more focused path. "Our students get presented with a pretty special and unique cross-genre approach to contemporary music. We strongly encourage students to jump from instrument to instrument. They take some big risks and learn from each other and that's how we make the strong, well-rounded, holistic contemporary musician."

And the students have strong role models from the teaching staff, where collaboration is a common theme. The team has three permanent staff members, Glenda and lecturers Robin Toan and Samuel Holloway, supported by a team of talented contract staff including James Gardner, Rachael Morgan, Tama Waipara, Sara Jane Erika, Age Pryor and Chris O'Connor. "We are all very active as practitioners and researchers and that informs our teaching and makes for a very lively work environment at times. We all have a range of interests that overlap quite often as well so it's pretty rich."

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Samuel Holloway

Music Lecturer Samuel Holloway is a composer, writer and commentator, who is on the board of the Composers Association and edits the Association's yearbook *Canzona*. As well as this, Samuel is the artistic director of the contemporary music ensemble 175 East and is currently editing a Creative New Zealand-funded

publication entitled *Landscape Preludes*, a collection of piano pieces by 12 leading New Zealand composers.

"My research takes a number of forms, but it all feeds into my teaching and my creative practice. It's important that students recognise the importance of taking a broad-minded approach to their musical activity. My goal isn't just to prepare students for musical careers or for further study," says Samuel, "it's to help develop their individual creative voices."

Earlier this year Samuel travelled to the Netherlands to work with the Orkest de Ereprijs, and he is currently working on compositional projects with musicians from Austria and Australia. Samuel is one of three finalists in the 2011 SOUNZ Contemporary Award, New Zealand's premier composition award, with the winner being announced at the Silver Scroll Awards event.



Robin Toan

Music Lecturer Robin Toan says that being active and knowledgeable within the international music scene is vital for connections, commissions and collaborations and helps students to see their teachers as working musicians. "I think it helps students immensely to see through us that it is possible to write music and have that played and to make a

'musician's life' through writing, performing and teaching."

Robin is an acclaimed composer, who recently had a work commissioned and performed by the Manukau Symphony Orchestra. After the premiere in Manukau, it was performed the following night in the Auckland Town Hall, with *The New Zealand Herald* music critic describing it as "cleverly written" and showing Robin's "expertise with an orchestral canvas". "I used an uncommon combination of four soloists, flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon with orchestra in a one movement concertino. It grew on the players," laughs Robin. "With new music they see their notes on the page and don't know how it all fits together until everyone has their part perfect and then it clicks."