



Rebecca Nelson – Singing for New Zealand at Gallipoli

words: joanne taylor images: supplied by the new zealand
defence force and rebecca nelson

It's a big leap from the talent show at Northland's Mall in Christchurch to representing your country at one of the world's largest events for 2015 – the commemoration of the ANZAC landings at Gallipoli on April 25, 2015. Christchurch-born singer, Rebecca Nelson, has managed to make this leap and carve out a career for herself in music, something that she could not have imagined.

IT'S A BIG LEAP from the talent show at Northland's Mall in Christchurch to representing your country at one of the world's largest events for 2015 – the commemoration of the ANZAC landings at Gallipoli on April 25, 2015. Christchurch-born singer, Rebecca Nelson, has managed to make this leap and carve out a career for herself in music, something that she could not have imagined.

Rebecca grew up in Christchurch and like so many aspiring singers, she went to dancing, singing and piano lessons during much of her formative years. She confesses to not really taking a career in music as a serious proposition until she moved to Ireland when she was 20. There was no easy road ahead as a musician. Rebecca started out on the streets of Dublin as a busker.

“It was just me and my baby busking amplifier,” says Rebecca. “You learn a lot about yourself while busking. And you get instant feedback, as anyone can walk up to you and tell you what they think about you and your music. If you can survive on the streets and make a living from your music, you can survive anywhere.”

Rebecca has always been one to set herself goals and she spotted an opportunity when the All Blacks were in Ireland to play a test match against the Irish team. “I saw some of the All Blacks walking along the street towards me so I started to sing *Pokarekare Ana*. Ma'a Nonu thought I was miming it! But then and there I set myself a goal to sing for my country.”

The Irish classical music group, The Priests, recognised her talent and she was invited to tour with them around Ireland in 2010 as their guest soloist. This was a fabulous opportunity to gain some skills on the stage and in front of larger audiences. With this experience under her belt, Rebecca moved back to Christchurch at the end of 2010 and was invited to tour with Will Martin, the youngest man in history to top the UK Classical Charts for his South Island tour.

It was these tours that enabled Rebecca to approach the Irish Rugby team management when they came to New Zealand to convince them she should be the one to sing their national anthem before the All Black test in Christchurch. “I wrote a letter to them which must have been quite compelling as I got the job. I can remember walking out onto the field and feeling so nervous, especially in that moment before the music starts. Once the music begins it all flows but there is a lot of pressure out there.”

Singing the New Zealand anthem was her dream and this was achieved in 2013 at the final Bledisloe Cup match in Dunedin. Rebecca has also had the honour of singing the anthems for Australia, England, France at other sporting



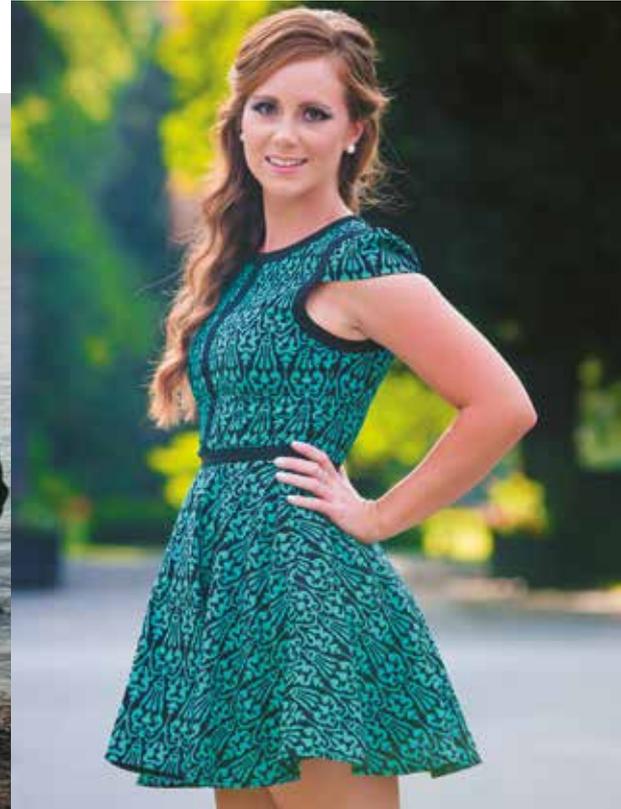
Above: Rebecca and Able Musician Jessica Hix, shed many tears whilst visiting the cemeteries at Gallipoli in 2014.

OPPOSITE: Singing at Gallipoli in 2014 was a huge privilege and it is an honour for Rebecca to perform again in 2015.

events and each time the nerves play their part in lifting her performance in front of such large crowds.

Rebecca's singing style is described as classical crossover which really means she has a voice suited to classical music and she can sing across a wide range of musical genres. “I love the 1950s era songs and enjoy reviving them as the music was so pure then. My inspiration to even start singing came from watching Shirley Jones singing *If I Loved You* in the 1956 film *Carousel*. I can remember thinking to myself that's what I want to do – she was just so classy,” laughs Rebecca.

It is this classical style that led to Rebecca being discovered by the Royal New Zealand Navy. She had relocated further north, first to Nelson and latterly to Auckland, where she was discovered busking in Devonport. “This man in a uniform approached me and asked me about my music and what I was doing. We ended up having a cup of coffee and he invited me to sing with the Royal New Zealand Navy Band as a guest artist for a tour of the North Island. The man in uniform turned out



Left: Rebecca proudly stands with her fellow musicians on the shores of Gallipoli.

Right: Rebecca is getting ready to launch her second album, *Reflection*.

to be the musical director of the Royal New Zealand Navy Band, Lieutenant Commander Owen Clarke.

“I was so blown away,” says Rebecca. “Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I would end up as part of the Defence Force.” After three months of working with the Navy Band, Rebecca officially enlisted with the Royal New Zealand Navy as a reservist. She has the rank of Able Musician and regularly performs with the band around New Zealand.

“It is a huge honour for me to serve my country in this small way. I so admire the men and women who serve in the Defence Forces full time and really enjoy the opportunity to work alongside them,” says Rebecca. “We sing at commemorations, concerts and church services and sing a range of music from beautiful New Zealand songs such as *Pokarekare Ana* and the hauntingly beautiful song *E To Matou Matua* (The Lord’s Prayer).

In 2014 Rebecca had the honour of singing at the 99th commemoration of the ANZAC landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula at the Dawn Service in Turkey. “This was a truly amazing experience,” says Rebecca, “a real once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I felt so very honoured to be there and it was just so incredible to be performing – the people, the scenery – it all combines to make it a really special place. We travelled with a historian who told us the history of the major battles, and that 600 had lost their lives from this trench in less than a minute. There were quite a few tears. We also had a Maori Cultural

Group with us who welcomed us onto each site which was incredibly moving.”

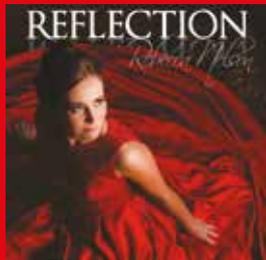
Well she may have thought that 2014 was an incredible service to be a part of, Rebecca and the combined Royal New Zealand Navy, NZ Army and Royal NZ Air Force Band are now preparing to perform at the 100th Anniversary of the ANZAC landings at Gallipoli 2015. This event promises to be an incredible tribute to the men and women who fought on this peninsula over the eight months from April 1915.

Gallipoli marked the first major combat role for the New Zealand forces in the First World War and is where the Anzac relationship was founded. 2,779 New Zealanders and 8,709 Australians were killed or died of their wounds during this campaign. The last of the New Zealand and Australian troops were evacuated from Gallipoli on the 19 and 20 December 1915. In total the Allies lost 44,150 people and the Ottoman Empire lost 86,692*.

Australia and New Zealand will conduct three commemorative services at Gallipoli on Anzac Day this year. The Dawn Service at the Anzac Commemorative Site is jointly conducted by both countries and is followed by an Australian Memorial Service at Lone Pine, and a New Zealand Memorial Service at Chunuk Bair.

For Rebecca and the combined forces band, their job will start at around 8pm on April 24th when the entertainment will continue throughout the night for the estimated crowd of

After singing at Gallipoli in 2014, Rebecca was inspired to create an album of the music and songs from this performance along with some special favourites. "After I had finished at Gallipoli a gentleman approached me and said, 'thankyou for keeping this music alive'," said Rebecca. "So I came home and started working on the idea of an album. Rebecca fundraised more than \$11,000 via New Zealand's crowd funding platform Pledge Me to self-produce the album, titled *Reflection*. It will have a strong military feel with old war songs from the likes of Vera Lynn and other inspirational numbers performed during last year's commemorations. The album also features guest performances by some of the country's most talented musicians, The Royal New Zealand Navy Band and the Christchurch Boys Choir.



40,000 people. "We will try and get a few hours sleep during the night but we need to be up at 4:00am to prepare for the Dawn Service," says Rebecca.

The songs that Rebecca will be singing on Anzac Day will include a medley of war songs which is still being worked on, *Pokarekare Ana* which will not leave a dry eye in the audience, and two others. She will perform at the combined service as well as the New Zealand service later that morning at Chanuk Bair.

"It's an honour and a privilege to be at Gallipoli for the 2015 commemorative services. To be there and reflect on who we are as a country will be incredible. I am so proud of New Zealand's role and how Gallipoli really earned New Zealand the respect of the other Allied nations with how we handled ourselves in 1915."

We will look forward to seeing and hearing Rebecca in action this Anzac Day and I for one am honoured to have her representing New Zealand at this important occasion. ■

Rebecca has pledged to donate a portion of all album sales to the Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association (RSA). The album will be available for purchase at selected The Warehouse stores, Orange Studios, Marbecks, iTunes and the Rebecca Nelson website. www.rebeccanelson.co.nz

KEEP YOUR FAMILY WARM + COZY THIS WINTER

with a fire from Laser Electrical, your heating & lighting specialist!



Come in & find out why the R5000 & R10000 are our top selling fires!



726 East St, Ashburton OPEN: Mon-Fri 8-5.30 Sat 10-1 →



Laser Electrical Ashburton 726 East Street 0800 LASER 4 U	Laser Electrical Rolleston 831 Jones Road 0800 LASER 4 U	Laser Electrical Geraldine 17 Peel Street 03 693 3999	Laser Electrical Temuka 44 Vine Street 03 615 6622
---------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------



www.laserelectrical.co.nz

0800 LASER 4 U (0800 527 374)

"Totally Dependable"

