

# The Balladeer

## Acoustic Routes Newsletter

June 2026 — Aotearoa New Zealand

**Celebrating community, music, and the joy of playing together**

[www.acousticroutes.org.nz](http://www.acousticroutes.org.nz) | Johnsonville Club, 1 Norman Lane, Johnsonville



### Welcome / Nau mai, haere mai

Kia ora everyone,

A warm welcome to this month's newsletter. Here's what's been happening in our folk community, what's coming up, and a few stories from the people who make our sessions special. You'll see we've made some changes to the layout, mainly to make it easier to produce each month. We welcome your feedback; drop us a line at [Balladeer@acousticroutes.org.nz](mailto:Balladeer@acousticroutes.org.nz).

**Inside:** Upcoming AR events and news, and the Music Noticeboard with upcoming events across the wider motu.

## JOAN PRIOR AWARD

\$500 award for Wellington folk creatives & musicians  
aged 18 to 25

***Now seeking applications for the 2026 award,  
closing 9 August 2026***

- Supporting younger musicians and folk enthusiasts to share the benefits of folk music
  - Keeping the traditions alive

See the webpage for more info and the application process.  
<https://acousticroutes.org.nz/joan-prior-award-entry/>

# AR Monthly Concert: Erin Manu and Frank John with support acts Jude Madill and Melling Station Boys

Johnsonville Club, 1 Norman Lane, Monday 15 June, 7:30pm

Entry: \$20/\$15 for AR members. Cash only (no EFTPOS facilities).

## Frank John and Erin Manu



Netherlands-born Frank John brings his technical brilliance to this New Plymouth-based duo, and his Taranaki-born wife Erin Manu provides driving rhythm guitar and has a reputation for her unique style on banjo – described as having ‘a kinda swagger’ – by Albi from Albi and The Wolves.

Through sizzling acoustic instrumentals and soulful delivery of ballads, they capture the essence of guitar and song with variations on folk, blues, country, swing and classical

genres. They perform some hidden gems, well known standards and their own compositions, with an extra polish as they’ve recently been recording a new album.

## Jude Madill

With a voice that has been likened to both Kathy Matea and Jewel, Jude Madill plays and sings with great feel and an equal enthusiasm and love for music. She has played both solo and in groups, most recently The Madillionaires, Eagals and The Kist, around the local folk scene. Jude has been singing 'since forever' although she has not always performed as a songwriter, she says "For a good part of my life I only sang and played other peoples music – then, quite suddenly, when I was 30-something I started writing songs myself." Most of Jude's original music falls somewhere in the folk/alt-country box although her musical inspiration comes from an eclectic playlist.



Photo credit: Ebony Lamb



## Melling Station Boys

The Melling Station Boys, Wellington’s only pure Bluegrass band, was formed back in 2015 after an Acoustic Routes blind date concert way which brought together founder members Alastair McCarthy and Todd Foster. The band grew from there, with Andrew Bicknell and Ian Smith joining the line up, and much more recently, Kevin Ikin. MSB are a classic Bluegrass combo, with banjo, guitar,

fiddle, bass and mandolin, strong vocals and harmonies, keeping this musical tradition alive in Wellington. The Melling Boys have a wide repertoire of traditional and contemporary Bluegrass songs and tunes, as well as other songs from the Americana music world, and one or two originals. The Melling Station Boys are: Alastair McCarthy – guitar and vocals; Todd Foster – banjo and vocals; Ian Smith – fiddle and vocals; Kevin Ikin – mandolin and vocals. For their performance at Acoustic Routes, the band will be joined by Bill Vella on double bass.

## 🎵 More Acoustic Routes Events

🎵 **Acoustic Routes Monthly Sing-around** - Monday 8 June, 7pm, upstairs at the Johnsonville Club, 1 Norman Lane, Johnsonville. Come along and share your latest musical learnings, finds, creations, or favourites with a listening audience. Monthly second Mondays.

🎵 **AR Plimmerton Open Mic** - Thursday 11 June, 7pm, Plimmerton Boating Club, 10 Moana Road, Plimmerton. Hosted by Roy McGuinness. No pre-booked spots – put your name up when you get there. Spread the word. Monthly second Thursdays.

🎵 **Acoustic Routes Social Club** featuring The Shorter Blacks - Wednesday 17 June, 1:30pm, Upstairs in the Johnsonville Club, 1 Norman Lane, Johnsonville. Monthly third Wednesdays. The guest act will perform for the first half hour or so, and then we'll go around the circle for anyone else to perform or lead an item. All welcome. \$5 requested to pay the performers.



The Shorter Blacks: Roy says, "Ahha! Two old crusties still doing what they love. The Short Blacks! Since I lost my legs, now known as The Shorter Blacks. Bringing you Celtic ballads with guitar in the hands of an English man. Go figure! Sit back, relax and maybe the odd stretched yarn too." The Short(er) Blacks are Roy McGuinness and Julian Ward. Definitely not short on personality, humour or musical talent!

🎵 **Newtown Acoustic Sound's Open Mic** - Sunday 28 June 5:15 – 8pm, Upstairs at The Office, 124 Riddiford Street, Newtown. Held on the last Sunday of each month, in association with Acoustic Routes, organized by Janine Mitchell with back-up from Kevin Ikin.

Contact: [janinemitchell04@gmail.com](mailto:janinemitchell04@gmail.com), [kevin.ikin@supermail.co.nz](mailto:kevin.ikin@supermail.co.nz), or [newtownacousticsound@gmail.com](mailto:newtownacousticsound@gmail.com).



## 🎸 Community Stories – concert review

**Review of May AR Concert featuring Sage Plus, Bruce Carey and Dean Murray**

Acoustic Routes likes to put the spotlight on home grown music during New Zealand Music Month and it delivered that in fine fashion at the May concert.

BRUCE CAREY, who opened the show, is a prolific song writer whose well-researched songs document the stories of many people, places and events. For this concert, he focused on grim tales from Wellington.

They included "I've Seen", His telling of the Wahine disaster, one of three songs in his set about shipping disasters in the capital. In "The Loneliest Man in Wellington" he delved into the gut wrenching tale of Kim Lee, held captive and dying on a tiny island in the harbour after being falsely accused of having leprosy. The Wellington Trades Hall bombing and Loafers Lodge arson were also recalled.

DEAN MURRAY, who's based at Manukau north of Wellington, is another highly productive songsmith, with about 150 songs under his belt so far, and counting. How he remembers them all I don't know, but he picked out a very satisfying selection for us.

Dean, in true troubadour style, strode the stage in bare feet with guitar and harmonica, delivering songs of personal experience and philosophy about the world we live in. A song wondering what it's like to be the moon; another about having faith that things will work out; "In the Now", describing his love of kayak fishing and "Hope", arising out of the covid troubles.

The main act, SAGE PLUS, is usually a duo, but Sue Rose and Murray Kilpatrick are sometimes joined by Susan Ellis, hence the name, Sage +.

It's a great combo - Sue's lovely singing, Murray's intricate finger picking on guitar and deep voice, enriched by Susan Ellis' violin accompaniment.

They drew from the Kiwi back catalogue, with songs like Paul Bond's description of a hard life on the land in "The Scrub and The Blackberry", and of course a classic Peter Cape song about working for a hard-arsed boss during haymaking. "New Plymouth Blues", a local adaptation of an old blues standard, I think, and "Pauatahanui, Murray and Sue's own composition that's become well recognised on the Wellington folk scene. They brought the evening to a gentle close with the beautiful "Hine e Hine".

So, New Zealand Music Month was well acknowledged. And not forgetting, a big shout out to Joe Coleman for another top notch sound job.

*Kevin Ikin*

### **Write-up of May AR Social Club featuring Peter Berry**

The May Social club was a special one with Peter Berry for NZ Music Month, with great renditions of some well-known "classics", amusing and poignant, including Taumarānui on the main trunk line, Rain bird in the tea tree, Down trou, Goodnight Ruby and the State House song by Dave Jordan, The tramper's lament, Double bunking, Peter's own song The girl in the sun dress, Tararua ranges, and The day the pub burned down. Plenty of sing-along opportunities, of which there's sure to be more in June with the Short(er) Blacks.

*Janette Munneke*

## 🔊 Feature: AI for President? Opinion piece by Janette Munneke

Someone brought an AI-generated poem to the Sing-around this week. I understand the desire to play with new technology, and I'd definitely rather see it used for writing poems than making bombs; however, it did raise for me some thoughts about human creativity. I've always embraced technology that can remove the sort of drudgery of tasks that have to be done regularly, for instance I'm writing this by dictating it into my phone which is typing it up for me as I go. It means I can write faster and put thoughts on paper in a more fluid way, and even lie here in bed to do it! I've seen that as a way to increase the time and energy I have for more creative pursuits like writing, playing music, getting together with people. But if AI could do the creative stuff what does that mean for human creativity? Where does it leave us?

It also made me think a bit more about Acoustic Routes, and the Sing-around in particular. We started it a while ago when we were still using the community hub rooms. It was in the evening slot, then shifted to an afternoon slot. This year we're doing it in the evening again. Turn out has been very small so far, but I genuinely have enjoyed it more than many music events I attend. Each time it's been a slightly different group, different things that I haven't heard before and we've taken time to chat in between, to learn about the songs and the experience of performing them, and what they mean in our lives. I don't think I could have such an experience with AI because it's a human experience. I've come away feeling enriched.

Which leads me to the wider Acoustic Routes experience. Someone said to me the other day, "I can't go on the committee because I haven't really got anything to offer". It's not the first time I've heard that said. I really wonder what Acoustic Routes is to people who feel that way. If you're one of them, what would need to change for you to feel that it really is your club and that you have something to offer in the decision making and running of it? Sure, not everybody wants to or can do the work involved, but being on the committee is about guiding the ship through what can be fairly choppy waters, and it needs representation from our community. In that respect everyone who is a part of that community has something to offer. I feel that we are coming to some pinch points now as our community is getting older and reducing in number, and there's more and different musical activities available in the wider community. Perhaps even AI is a threat, if it can write poems and songs.

We have to ask, what is our niche? Do we have one? For me it's being part of a community. Being able to turn up and see and hear people perform, have a laugh, have a chat... And so much more. What does it mean to you? What would it mean to you if we didn't have a concert each month, or a social club meeting? If there wasn't an Acoustic Routes get-together of some sort to go to, to hang out with other enthusiasts and share your stories and your music? Would you miss it? Would it matter to you? I'm asking partly because I'm genuinely curious to know what value it has in your life, and also because we are approaching the time when Ruth, who has done the heavy lifting as president for the last six years, constitutionally has to stand down from the committee for a year. If the club does mean something to you, if it still has a valued part to play in your life, now is a good time to think about taking a part in navigating it through whatever the next year brings. It obviously doesn't have to be as President if that's not your bag, but we will need some more keen committed people on the committee in the coming year. I don't think we can rely on AI to do it, although that time may well be coming.

The AGM is in August. I recently asked AI to come up with a new format for the Balladeer, which I initially rejected, but I did like one set of words it gave me based on what I told it about the Club, so to paraphrase the words of AI's paraphrasing of my words, whether you are just starting out on your folk music journey or are a long-term member or seasoned musician, you do have something to offer, you can and do contribute to the life of the soul of this club.

This article was written by a human. It may contain errors and it certainly contains the writer's own opinions and thoughts, unedited by AI.

## Useful Resources

### Notice: ANZFA Folk Music Awards 2026 – Album Submissions Open

Submissions are now underway for the 2026 ANZFA Folk Music Awards, celebrating the breadth and diversity of New Zealand folk music. Artists have until **midnight, 31 August 2026** to submit albums released between **1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026**.

Albums may be commercially released via streaming, download or physical media, and can range from home-grown bedroom recordings to professionally produced independent label releases. Kiwi artists living overseas are also eligible (terms and conditions apply).

Five awards will be presented:

- Best Traditional Album
- Best Original Album
- Best Kiwiana Album
- Best Americana Album
- Overall Best Folk Album 2026 (voted by ANZFA members)

Submissions cost **\$30** and involve uploading tracks in mp3 format via the ANZFA submission portal. <https://anzfa.org.nz/fma>

You do not need to be an ANZFA member to enter, but membership is required to vote in the final award selection. Finalists will be announced at the Wellington Folk Festival on **Sunday 25 October**.

Artists, labels and supporters are encouraged to spread the word far and wide through newsletters and social media.

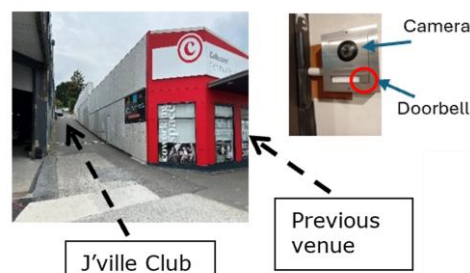
## About Acoustic Routes

Acoustic Routes (Wellington Folk Centre Incorporated) is a club for people who enjoy playing and listening to folk and acoustic styles of music.

Our main monthly event is every third Monday except in January, October and December. It generally features a concert, usually with a visiting artist and support acts from amongst our membership.

Other regular (monthly) events include an informal Social Club with a booked guest, held on the third Wednesday of most months in the afternoon, and a Sing-around on the second Monday evening of most months where attendees can participate. We also support two Open Mic Gigs: Newtown Acoustic Sound Open Mic at the Office Pub in Newtown, the last Sunday of each month, and the Open Mic at the Plimmerton Boat Club, on the second Thursday of the month.

Our venue for the third Monday event, Social Club and Sing-around is the Johnsonville Club, 1 Norman Lane, Johnsonville, Wellington, which has parking and a bar, and a lift for wheelchair access. (If you need the lift, it might pay to phone the venue to find out if it is operating.)



The restaurant is not open on Monday nights when we usually meet but you can order bar snacks and drinks at the bar. If you want an alcoholic drink and are not a member of the Johnsonville Club, you will need to get a member to sign you in as a guest. You may need to press the doorbell to access the building.

## Membership

Members get discounted entry and a say in the club's activities.

The membership year is from July to June. To join, go to <https://acousticroutes.org.nz/join-us/>. Payment online is appreciated.

Acoustic Routes publishes this newsletter (The Balladeer) at the start of every month, and an email update about acoustic gigs in the region later in the month. You can subscribe online on this webpage - <https://acousticroutes.org.nz/news/> or contact [publicity@acousticroutes.org.nz](mailto:publicity@acousticroutes.org.nz).

## Want to perform?

The Acoustic Routes Committee would like to hear from you if you are interested in performing at our events, including support acts for our monthly concerts. Contact us at: [performers@acousticroutes.org.nz](mailto:performers@acousticroutes.org.nz).

## Acoustic Routes contacts

- President: Ruth Birnie [president@acousticroutes.org.nz](mailto:president@acousticroutes.org.nz)
- Correspondence: Anne McGregor [secretary@acousticroutes.org.nz](mailto:secretary@acousticroutes.org.nz)
- Treasurer/Membership: Sue Ikin [treasurer@acousticroutes.org.nz](mailto:treasurer@acousticroutes.org.nz)
- Balladeer: Anna Macfarlane [balladeer@acousticroutes.org.nz](mailto:balladeer@acousticroutes.org.nz)
- Acoustic Routes updates: Anne McGregor [secretary@acousticroutes.org.nz](mailto:secretary@acousticroutes.org.nz)
- Performance opportunities: [performers@acousticroutes.org.nz](mailto:performers@acousticroutes.org.nz)
- Postal address: PO Box 27-191 Marion Square, Wellington, New Zealand.
- Website: [www.acousticroutes.org.nz](http://www.acousticroutes.org.nz)

## **Balladeer Music Events Noticeboard**

Where you can advertise your music-related items—lessons, instruments, gigs, band members wanted, etc. To place a notice, please email [balladeer@acousticroutes.org.nz](mailto:balladeer@acousticroutes.org.nz)

**🎵 Mainly Acoustic Music Club**, Mayfair Café, 116 Main Street, Upper Hutt, **A week early to celebrate with the Upper Hutt Music Festival** Featuring Neil Billington, Cindy Muggeridge and Anje Glindeman, with CP30. Tuesday 2 June 7:30-10pm  
[www.mainlyacoustic.co.nz/contact-us](http://www.mainlyacoustic.co.nz/contact-us)

- NOTE: Lift kindly offered to the Mainly Acoustic concerts from Ngaio (or nearby) to and from Mayfair Cafe, 116 Main Street, Call Bill Dashfield 0221 923 326

**🎵 Burgin, Kerr and Norman with Marian Price-Carter**, Vogelmorn Upstairs, 93 Mornington Rd, Brooklyn, Wellington, Saturday 6 June 7.30pm

**🎵 The Overdogs with Stan Antonio**, Moon, 167 Riddiford St, Newtown, 7 June, 7pm. The Overdogs are John Newton, Andy Horwood, Jude Douglas, Tony Paine and Liam Prince, with Hannah Blumhardt. For 'tears-in-your-craft-beer ballads and footstomping tunes'. Folk-indie duo Stan Antonio, Phoebe Smith and Alex Howie, will bring guitars, banjos and harmonies.

**🎵 King Leo and Oscar**, The Undercurrent, 118 Tory Street, Te Aro, Thursday 11 June 7pm

**🎵 Cut the Power**, Thunderbird Cafe, 154 Featherston St, Wellington, Friday 12 June 5.30-7.30pm. Three talented young guys – bound to impress.

**🎵 The Wooden Box Band play Hilltop**, Upland Rd, Kelburn, Saturday 13 June 7pm, Teas, coffee & snacks provided. BYO [www.hilltophouseconcerts.co.nz/upcoming-gigs/](http://www.hilltophouseconcerts.co.nz/upcoming-gigs/)

**🎵 Out Loud 2026**, Rogue and Vagabond, 18 Garrett St, Saturday 13 June 8pm Floyd Marsden, Cordelia's, Extra Butter, Danica Bryant. Jazzy rock, indie folk and funky pop

**🎵 The Shenanigans**, Days Bay Pavilion, Sunday 14 June, 6-8pm

**🎵 Imaginary Folksongs – Alex Trask**, The Undercurrent, 118 Tory Street, Te Aro, Wednesday 17 June, 7pm

**🎵 Rosetta and Robyn**, Thunderbird Cafe, 154 Featherston St, Wellington, Friday 19 June 5.30-7.30pm

**🎵 Folk and Funk – Dunluvly, Pōhatu and Christine Croke**, The Undercurrent, 118 Tory Street, Te Aro, Saturday 20 June 7pm

**🎵 Rag Poets**, Days Bay Pavilion, 611B Marine Drive, Sunday 21 June 6-8pm

**🎵 Neil Billington and Dave Murphy**, Thunderbird Cafe, 154 Featherston St, Wellington, Friday 26 June 5.30-7.30pm

## **Regular Folk Music Events Noticeboard**

Look out for these events – they're probably on even if we haven't been advised of the particulars for the month in question. Check using the contact details to be sure. To place a notice, please email [balladeer@acousticroutes.org.nz](mailto:balladeer@acousticroutes.org.nz)

**🎵 Wellington Traditional Tunes Session**, The Welsh Dragon Bar, 10a Cambridge Terrace, Wellington

- Every Tuesday from 7.30pm  
Fine beer and food to be had at the bar. 1st Tuesday slow session aimed at beginners, followed by regular session.
- Contact: <https://wellingtonslowsession.wordpress.com/>

**🎵 Moon Jam Nites**, 167 Riddiford St, Newtown, Regular ... Every Tuesday night from 7.30pm. The evening starts off open mic, then moves into a full on jam towards the end. Sign up with your time slot. You can call upon many talented musicians to help play your slot. A full stage with electric guitar, bass, keyboard, drums, mics, lights and full support from our sound tech. Bring your own songs, poems, and friends (and make some new ones too)

**🎵 Morris dancing**, David Barnes <https://sites.google.com/site/nzmorrisdancing/>

**🎵 Mainly Acoustic Music Club**, Mayfair Cafe, 116 Main Street, Upper Hutt

- (Mostly) every 2nd Tuesday of the month, 7.30pm - 10pm  
Contact: Fiona Armstrong-McIntosh 0211205961 [fionastrongmc@gmail.com](mailto:fionastrongmc@gmail.com)  
Club committee email: [info@mainlyacoustic.co.nz](mailto:info@mainlyacoustic.co.nz)  
Website: [https://mainlyacoustic.co.nz/coming\\_attractions/](https://mainlyacoustic.co.nz/coming_attractions/)

**🎵 Pukerua Bay Folk Club Sing-around**, 9 Donlin Rd, Pukerua Bay,

- 1st Thursday of the month, 8pm. For details, please contact [musicianmurray@gmail.com](mailto:musicianmurray@gmail.com)

**🎵 Pōneke Shanty Club**, The Welsh Dragon Bar, 10a Cambridge Terrace, Wellington

- 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month, 7-9pm

**🎵 Wellington Bluegrass Society – Society Nights**, Abandoned Taproom, Petone (check website for latest info)

- 4th Thursday of the month, 7pm
- Contact: Andrew Bicknell, (04) 477 0069, <https://wellingtonbluegrass.net.nz/>
- See the Wellington Bluegrass Society website for more details and to book tickets. <https://wellingtonbluegrass.net.nz/event-detail/>

**🎵 Levin Folk Music Club**, Horowhenua Scottish Society Hall, cnr Bartholomew Rd and Middlesex St.

- 2nd Friday of the month, 7.30pm
- Blackboard concert plus guest artist
- Entry: Members \$5, Non-members \$10, Children \$3 (includes supper)
- Club night: 4th Friday of the month, 7.30pm, \$2 koha

### 🎵 **Ceol Alba Scottish Music Club**, Lower Hutt

- 4th Friday of the month, 7.30 - 9.30pm. A club for playing and/or listening to (mostly) traditional Scottish music. Sheet music supplied or downloadable.
- Cost: \$5 per night
- Contact: Lynne Scott, **04 565 0164** [lynne@scott.gen.nz](mailto:lynne@scott.gen.nz)

🎵 **Wellington Irish Society**, Wilton Bowling Club, last Friday of the month 7pm  
Wellington Irish Society will be headquartered at the Wilton Bowling Club with a regular "Irish Night" on the last Friday of each month, celebrating its music, culture, stories, and community spirit. <https://www.wellingtonirish.nz/>

🎵 **Acoustic Music Evenings**, Niom Bistro, 169 Riddiford St, Newtown, Saturdays at 6-8pm

### 🎵 **Wellington Bluegrass Society**

- **Old Time and Bluegrass Music Sessions** – Memelink Artspace, 223 The Esplanade, Petone. Second Sunday each month
- **WBS Society Nights** – Abandoned Taproom, Petone. Fourth Thursday each month. See the Wellington Bluegrass Society website for more details <https://wellingtonbluegrass.net.nz/>

🎵 **The Hanging Ditch**, 14 Leeds St, Te Aro, third Sunday of the month 4 – 6pm, hosts a gig where you can listen to professional Irish music for free with some tasty cocktails and snacks. A closed invite session with the guests changing every week. If intermediate players would like to give playing a try, contact Em Griffiths at: [emceltic2@gmail.com](mailto:emceltic2@gmail.com) Gigs held **3rd Sunday monthly**.

🎵 **Songwriters Showcase at Moon**, 167 Riddiford St, Newtown, third Sunday of the month, 4-10pm. Open Mic from 4pm, show starts 7pm. For more info, see the Facebook page *6021 Songs* or email a query to [6021songs@gmail.com](mailto:6021songs@gmail.com)

## 💜 **Closing Note**

Thanks for being part of our musical whānau. Whether you're a seasoned player or just starting out, your presence makes our community richer. See you at the next session.

Ngā mihi nui

**Your Acoustic Routes Committee**