

"Wairua The Soul of Our Practice

Kia ora koutou katoa,

Welcome to the Wairua edition of Tune Me In Magazine.

When sixteen students from Te Kura o Noera gathered at Wintec Recording Studios to record Hirini Melbourne waiata with ukulele and taonga pūoro, something profound happened. As Trevania Walbaekken describes in her article, they weren't just making a recording — they were creating a taonga that weaves together te reo Māori, storytelling, and traditional instruments. They were giving voice to wairua.

Wairua. Spirit. Life force. Soul.

In music education, wairua is what transforms notes on a page into something that moves us, connects us, heals us. It's the difference between mechanical reproduction and authentic expression. It's what happens when music becomes a vessel for identity, ancestry, and belonging. This issue explores wairua from every angle — and in doing so, reveals a truth we must hold close as we navigate the changes ahead.

Where Wairua Lives

Throughout this issue, our contributors show us where wairua resides in music education. It pulses through cultural connection: in Suzy Cato's extensive resource list of local Aotearoa artists whose culturally relevant waiata deepen students' sense of belonging; in Molly Devine and Saylene Tanielu-Ulberg's songwriting programme where weaving te reo Māori and Pacific languages awakens students' sense of identity; in Delia Harrison's exploration of music as medicine for the soul, revealing how waiata, taonga pūoro, and traditional practices become vehicles for healing and spiritual awakening.

Wairua flourishes in intergenerational spaces. Tim Carson's pilot ukulele jam brought students and rest home residents together for side-by-side music-making, demonstrating how shared musical experiences create meaning across generations. Julie Wylie shows us how Musical Play creates profound spiritual and emotional connections when children are given time, space, and agency to listen, feel, and respond in their own way.

And wairua lives in authenticity — in the courage to be vulnerable, to express who you truly are. Jasmine Pene reveals this through her mentoring work at Crescendo Trust, where music becomes a vessel for rangatahi aged 15–24 to process challenges and discover their own mana.

Trinity Price's reflection on performing at the KBB music festival emphasises that authentic learning happens when students are taught how to rehearse and learn independently, not simply trained to reproduce behaviors. Lucien Panting's portrait of his teacher's studio reminds us that transformative learning experiences require joy, autonomy, and a delicate balance between practice and performance.

When Wairua Is Wounded

Several articles in this issue ask us to consider what happens when wairua is damaged or absent. Gracie McKay uses a deeply personal orchestral experience to examine how destructive learning environments can wound young musicians, exploring the psychological and pedagogical factors that either nurture or damage vulnerability. Her words are a sobering reminder that our responsibility as educators extends beyond technique — we are guardians of our students' wairua.

Judith Bell poses equally profound questions through the lens of AI music generation: where does the soul of music truly reside? In the final product, the creative process, the performer's breath and energy, the listener's response, or the technical expertise that shapes expression? As technology advances, these questions become more urgent. What we preserve, what we protect, reveals what we value.

Wairua Connects Us to Te Taiao

Chris Lam's reflection on the NZSO's 2025 Schools' Concert shows us another dimension of wairua — our connection to te taiao. Through pre-concert workshops where students composed their own soundscapes inspired by seasonal tohu, young people discovered that music isn't separate from the natural world; it's an expression of our relationship with it. This is wairua in its fullest sense — spirit that connects us not only to each other and our ancestors, but to the land itself.

Celebrating Our Community

Before I continue, I want to acknowledge some exciting developments in our Tune Me In whānau. We received our first letter to the editor from Ali Caldwell — a milestone that reminds us this magazine is truly a space for conversation and connection. We've launched our companion podcast, the Tune Me In Podcast, extending our conversations beyond the page. And we recently gathered together at the MENZA conference in Wellington, where the power of face-to-face connection reminded us why this work matters.

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We're also thrilled to welcome Lea'aesola Vuna (Sola Vuna) to MENZA's board. As a distinguished NZ-born Tongan musician and educator, Sola brings extensive expertise as a composer, conductor, and cultural advocate who has shaped countless young artists through his work celebrating and preserving Pasifika vocal traditions. His presence on our board strengthens our commitment to honouring all cultures within Aotearoa's music education landscape.

Finally, don't miss Delysse Glynn's updates on NCEA music assessment, including the new Assessor Practice Tool, and Brenda Oakey's review of music therapist Brea Murakami's podcast Instru(mental), which makes music cognition research accessible and practical for all of us.

Change Is Upon Us

As I write this, we stand at the threshold of significant change. The curriculum refresh is coming, bringing with it uncertainty, challenge, and opportunity in equal measure. In times of change, it's easy to become consumed by the practical questions: What will the new requirements be? How will assessment change? What resources will we need?

These are important questions. But they are not the first questions.

The first question must always be: How do we preserve and nurture wairua?

Because wairua is not a luxury item in music education — something nice to have if there's time after we've covered the "real" content. Wairua is the foundation. It's why music education matters. It's what makes music transformative rather than transactional.

The articles in this issue show us that educators across Aotearoa are already doing this work. They're creating spaces where wairua can flourish -spaces that honour culture, foster connection, embrace vulnerability, and trust students to find their own authentic voice. These aren't extras added onto "proper" music education. This is music education at its best.

As we move into the curriculum refresh, these examples light the way forward. They show us that holding fast to wairua and adapting our practice aren't opposing forces — they're two sides of the same commitment. We can embrace necessary change while protecting what matters most.

Looking Ahead: Resilience

Which brings me to our next issue. The theme will be Resilience in the Face of Change.

But here's what I'm learning from this current issue: resilience isn't about gritting our teeth and enduring change alone. True resilience comes from staying connected to our wairua, our communities, our sense of purpose. It comes from remembering why we do this work when the ground shifts beneath our feet.

The educators featured in these pages demonstrate that kind of resilience. They're not waiting for permission or perfect conditions. They're creating transformative learning experiences right now, in the midst of uncertainty, grounded in their deep commitment to their students' wairua.

As you read through this issue, I invite you to consider: What nurtures wairua in your own practice? What threatens it? And as change approaches, how will you ensure that wairua remains at the center of everything you do?

Because ultimately, that's the question this entire issue poses: In a world of constant change, shifting requirements, and new technologies, where does the soul of music education reside?

The answer is in these pages. It resides in you — in your commitment, your relationships, your courage to create spaces where authentic expression can flourish. It resides in your students when they discover their own voice, their own connection to music, their own mana.

It resides in wairua.

Ngā mihi nui, **Jessica Brown | Editor**



Jessica Brown is a dedicated music educator at Kaipara College with extensive academic credentials, including master's degrees in Educational Leadership, Creative Writing, and Music. Currently pursuing her PhD in music, Jessica's research explores the importance of teacher agency in interpreting and enacting the NZC.

Beyond the classroom, Jessica maintains an active musical presence as a performer with the folk ensemble Dirt Road Orchestra and as the treasurer of Auckland Art Songs and Lieder Group. Her commitment to education extends to her involvement with the PPTA (Post Primary Teachers' Association) as the Auckland Regional Secretary.

When not teaching or performing, Jessica enjoys running, crafting, and baking. She shares her life with her husband and three beloved dogs that keep her home lively and full of energy.