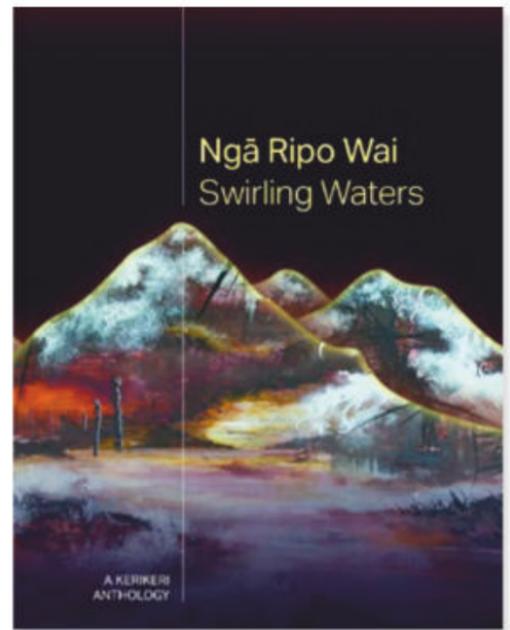


# BOOKS SYOOR



## THE BIRDS BEGAN TO SING: A MEMOIR OF A NEW ZEALAND COMPOSER

by Dorothy Buchanan  
The Cuba Press – \$40

Dorothy Buchanan is a composer and teacher of considerable renown. Her “Peace Song” is one of New Zealand classical music’s all-too-few hits, performed and heard around the world.

Proficiency in those two areas is not always accompanied by a life story with the depths that this one has. But written in Buchanan’s own words, with a little help from Lindsay Mitchell, her autobiography is a thing of joy.

The style is frequently wry and usually idiomatic with occasional echoes of Ronald Hugh Morrieson: “Nan got extremely pissed off when [Grandad’s] home brew exploded in the outhouse one day.” Buchanan seems to have escaped heavy editorial intervention and her personality shines through unfiltered. It is easy to see how so congenial a companion would have

made an excellent teacher.

She has another quality shared by New Zealand musical achievers: a personal modesty accompanying a realistic assessment of just how good she is. Equally typical of how New Zealand works are the number of “it’s a small world” connections in her life. These include modelling in a children’s fashion parade alongside the future filmmaker, and now dame, Gaylene Preston.

Hers was a musical family. Both parents were pianists. There were three pianos in the house and it was a case of first up, best instrument.

Buchanan could pick out tunes on the piano from the age of four. She was (and presumably still is) ambidextrous, although the significance of this for a pianist does not seem to have occurred to her. And she has perfect pitch. All the gifts a musician could ask for, and one perhaps more important than all the others but much rarer: from an early age, she was encouraged to be a composer. Which on the evidence here, has worked out extremely well.

## NGĀ RIPO WAI SWIRLING WATERS: A KERIKERI ANTHOLOGY

by Kathy Derrick  
Pavlova Press – \$28.75

Kerikeri suffers – or enjoys, depending on whom you ask – a current perception as a peaceful retirement settlement, particularly for Aucklanders. Its history of course is much richer and more diverse, not to mention more interesting, stretching back long before chiefs Hongi Hika and Rewa sold the land which became the foundation for “New Zealand’s longest continually occupied joint Māori-European settlement”.

This commendable anthology of poetry, short fiction and non-fiction attempts to do justice to the many facets of Kerikeri, and in general achieves that aim. It digs much deeper than the tourist-friendly establishments that line the main road through town, stretching from the weekend produce market to the historic Stone Store. As Lynne Hill’s untitled poem says: “history looks different here”.

As would be expected, there