

## FROM AUCKLAND TO THE BLUFF - SONGS OF THE SEA LINK PAST AND PRESENT, SOUTH AND NORTH

A young shipbuilder came here from Canada 150 years ago. When I say here, I mean to New Zealand, very new back then, he actually landed in the deep south, settling in Owaka in 1866. William McPhee built a dozen sailing ships which plied the Australasian seas for over 40 years.

His great-grandson Mike McPhee, an Owaka builder, was writing the stories of these ships and the people involved with them, and a couple of years ago heard a song on the radio. The song was by Glen Eden songwriter Rudy Sunde, about a fictitious coastal ship, the Flora Belle. "I thought, he doesn't need to make them up, I can give him real ships to write about," says Mike. He sent Rudy a chapter of the book, one thing led to another, and last October Rudy's group The Maritime Crew recorded a concert of the 15 songs at Titirangi Beach Hall. Interest must be declared here, as I engineered the recording.

Rudy wrote the first few songs, then put music to Mike's words for a few more. Bob, an experienced composer, did some then, and Warren and Alex, having never written songs before, made fine contributions. The lead singing was shared among all the Crew, so there is quite a range of styles and moods.

The resulting CDs were tucked in the back of each copy of *Catlins Bound*, and Mike booked the Crew to play at the book-launch in Owaka, and a week-long tour of the south as well. Mike: "I'm very pleased with how it's going, the book/CD has sold over 500 already, and reviews haven't come out yet." Wasn't the time-frame a bit tight? "It sure was. But the launch date was the latest one that suited Fergus and Mary." The Sutherlands run Catlins Wildlife Ecotours and summer is their busy time.

In addition, when funding applications had been grinding slowly last autumn, Fergus put up two-thirds of the money, saying "I couldn't wait three or four years, I might be dead." He also painted the striking

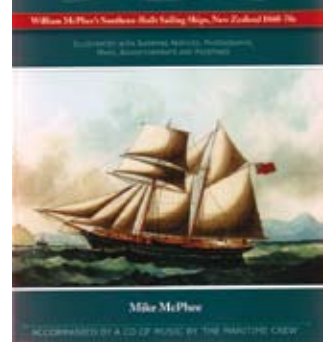
watercolours in the book.

Alex: "It was a brilliant experience. We commuted from their Ecotours base, solar-heated and double-glazed. Mike did a staggering amount of driving. The Stewart Island ferries gave us tickets. The smaller centres really laid it on for us."

Lew enjoyed "getting together as a group, you get to know each other so well away from home. And Mike was amazed that after a gig we'd all sing together for fun."

Bob found the tour "an all-round, full-on experience, pleasurable, tiring, exciting. The launch at Owaka museum was packed out, a real community thing. At Halfmoon Bay we had hail, we had gales, but we were all very warm, by the pot-bellied stove. The other extreme was the Presbyterian church in Gore, plain but impressive, gracious. And we were treated like royalty, especially in the little places."

### CATLINS BOUND



Serious Work - the Maritime Crew recording the *Catlins Bound* CD. From left: Alex McClennan, Lew Black, Bob Large, Paul Howarth, Warren Payne, and Rudy Sunde

Paul: "It was great fun to do the tour; I used to live in Dunedin years ago, and hadn't been back for ages. Making the CD was gruelling, though, with the limited time we had to arrange and rehearse."

It was special for Warren, who grew up in The Catlins, very aware of the sea. "My dad was lighthouse-keeper at Nugget Point."

And 'Captain' Rudy, whose song led to the expedition? "It went excellently, such lovely people. It was hectic, though, something every night, sometimes two in a day, I was buggered when I got home. Mike's coming up to Auckland and we'll take him round some bookshops. I don't mind giving some time, they were so good to us."

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