

Learning from one of the King's men

One of the founders of the renowned King's Singers is leading a group of dedicated vocalists as they prepare for two concerts in Nelson, as **Alice Cowdrey** reports.

Renowned British conductor and singer Brian Kay is having a challenging, yet rewarding, week. Under his tutorship, 55 singers are this week undergoing a steep learning curve to learn two French pieces, *Durufle Requiem* and Gounod's *Cecilia Mass*, before getting them up to performance standard.

It's the 11th time that singers have descended on Teapot Valley for the annual Nelson Summer School of Music, which wraps up at Nelson's Christ Church Cathedral with two concerts.

Kay, a bass, was a founding member of the King's Singers – one of the world's most celebrated vocal groups, formed in Britain 43 years ago.

From the home of Inga and Carl Browning – the organisers of the annual music school – Kay says he was delighted to be asked to direct it this summer.

He follows in the footsteps of many other renowned directors – including his great mentor, Sir David Willcocks, who has taken on the role six times, and who started Kay on his musical journey by awarding him a choral scholarship to King's College at Cambridge University.

Kay says he is in his element during the challenging week. There's no fluffing around as he teaches the singers a programme



The right notes: Inga Browning, Brian Kay and Carl Browning prepare for the Nelson Summer School Choir concerts.

Photo: MARTIN DE RUYTER

from scratch, moulds together the disparate voices, and gets the group up to performance standard.

"It's one of the greatest joys of my life – it's a sense of achievement."

The goal of the week is two performances during a full concert at the cathedral, tomorrow and on Friday.

Kay's musical career path was set at age 18, when he auditioned

with no high expectations in front of Willcocks, who was pleased to find just the voice he was looking for to take on the three-year scholarship.

Kay and five others formed the King's Singers out of university, with their debut under that name coming in 1968 at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall, where they took the stage with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

With the help of radio broadcasts and television, the group built a solid reputation. By the time Kay had spent 15 years with the group, he had performed 2000 concerts all over the world.

He first visited New Zealand with the King's Choir in 1972, during the group's first tour outside Britain. The first concert of the three-month, 35-date tour of Australia and New Zealand was in New

Plymouth, and the tour included a concert at the Nelson School of Music.

Following his career as a singer, Kay worked for the BBC as a music programme presenter for 25 years. During his annual visits to New Zealand, he records programmes for Radio New Zealand Concert.

He is enthusiastic about the hard work and satisfaction this

week will bring. "I love it. I would rather be doing that than anything. If you have a room full of singers giving up a lot of their summer break to do this, you know they are potty about singing and you can have a good time."

■ The Nelson Summer School Choir performs two concerts at Nelson's Christ Church Cathedral, tomorrow at 7.30pm and Friday at 2pm. Tickets are \$20 at the door.