

Review: Graham Wardrop

Venue: Old St John's

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Reviewed by: Adrienne Matthews

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For over thirty years NZ musician Graham Wardrop has travelled the world with his guitar, performing both solo and alongside such greats as Vanessa-Mae, Manhattan Transfer and Michael Crawford. It is widely accepted that he is NZ's best finger style guitarist and I can't recall anyone else producing such a remarkable array of effects from the one instrument. He is best known in Nelson for the likes of his Beatle's tribute shows but, as he announced, this was the first time he has played a whole concert of his own songs.

Well Mr Wardrop, the world has been missing out on a treat. It was obvious that the audience was captivated from the start by the plethora of great songs performed, stretching back to the 1970's "So Many Years" through to those off his album "Speed of Love".

Wardrop's song writing success stems from his ability to cut to the quick of life's experiences with a wisdom that is both endearing and vulnerable. The resulting lyrics reach right into the heart with images and feelings that are both warm and familiar. In "The Dunstan", a song about Central Otago, he captures the longing of New Zealanders for their own special place - "these mountains are the playgrounds of the urban dweller's dreams".

His sense of humour comes out in "God Made Skype" in the lyrics "how did we survive the silent night in the dim dark days before satellite?"

The skill with which Wardrop dresses his lyrics with sound is unique. The masterful finger picking, dynamic percussive elements, the most delicate harmonics along with unexpected and unusual chord changes made for a compelling listening experience.

My only disappointment was that the venue wasn't full to hear this unsung hero of NZ music at his very best.