



PIPES

&

PERCUSSION

179
MARCH
2017

**NEWSLETTER FOR
THE FRIENDS OF THE WURLITZER**

**& THE "KIWI CHAPTER" of the
AMERICAN THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY**

**EDITOR: James Duncan
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**UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE WURLITZER ORGAN TRUST of AUCKLAND
VISIT US ON [Facebook](#) OR AT: www.theatreorgans.com/wota**

A POSITIVE START!

Dear Members, it is so inspiring for us to see how many of you are renewing your subs and staying with us to see the Playhouse Theatre organ chambers built, our Wurlitzer organ installed, and finally, get to hear her sing once again. It is a slow and arduous journey that we're all on, but sticking together, we can all get through this and I know, the wait will be soooo worth it! Hang on in there!

Together with the membership subs, bookings are also rocking on in for our coming **Sunday March 19 Friends of the Wurlitzer Club Afternoon**. It would seem that many of you have a soft spot for trams as well as we do, and are looking forward to our feature item for the afternoon, "**Always a Tram in Sight!**". Our Wurlitzer organ does get a look in during the program, when we screen a video of trams in Auckland in the 1950s, with musical accompaniment by our very own Wurlitzer. We first screened this video back in 2008 during a show at our previous home, the Hollywood Cinema, when UK organist Len Rawle accompanied the video "live". We have since married the audio recording with the video footage to make for a stunning picture and sound tribute to the last years of the trams.

In this issue, we also include for your interest, a summary of 2016's small accomplishments, from the Wurlitzer Organ Trust of Auckland Chairman's Report.

*++ The opinions expressed in this Newsletter ++
are not necessarily those of The Wurlitzer Organ Trust of Auckland.*

THIS & THAT FROM HERE & THERE.....

WOTA POST OFFICE BOX NOW CLOSED!

Please be advised that the Wurlitzer Organ Trust of Auckland PO Box has now been relinquished and we urge you please, not to send any further communication to the PO Box. About the only mail we receive now is for show tickets.

SUBSCRIPTION RENEWALS & CLUB DOO TICKETS...

As previously noted, Subs are coming at a pleasing rate and for this we are eternally grateful to all of you who are staying with us to support the cause!

Heartfelt thanks also to those of you that include a donation with your sub renewal.

Our Club Afternoon coming up on **Sunday March 19 @ 2pm at the Playhouse Theatre** will give us a chance to get together once again and enjoy a Club Doo with a slightly different focus. We'll start with a light afternoon tea, following which we'll adjourn into the auditorium for our main feature, a presentation called "Always a Tram in Sight", telling the story behind 54 years of electric tram operation in Auckland. The presentation will feature some very rare images from those early days of trams and conclude with the video of trams in the 1950s.

Remember, this event is not open to the public, but you are more than welcome to bring friends along to enjoy the afternoon with you.

**Remember – NO DOOR SALES !
BOOK NOW! Tickets \$12 p/person
BOOKINGS CLOSE on March 14**

IMPORTANT! IMPORTANT! IMPORTANT! IMPORTANT!

**For some reason this message is not getting through –
PLEASE do NOT make internet payments into our bank account before you
have contacted our Membership & Ticket Secretary.**

**If Jan does not know to look out for your payment it WILL be missed, and
you will be in the embarrassing situation of turning up for a show and
there being no tickets/seats for you.**

**This applies for all internet banking payments –
Subs, Club Doo or Show Tickets.**

**Membership & Ticket Secretary Jan-Denise
Phone: 522-8944
Email: jandenise@xtra.co.nz**

PLAYHOUSE THEATRE UPDATE

The building consent submission has now been sent to Auckland Council to review and hopefully, they will grant consent to proceed with the building construction.

The WOTA share of \$5000 towards the \$10k application fee has now been paid to the Waitakere Playhouse Theatre Trust, and to all of you who contributed to this fund, please accept our sincere appreciation for your donations. Your donated funds totalled just on \$3000 and a very generous *Friend of the Wurlitzer* member topped up the fund to enable us to meet our \$5k contribution. Thank you all!

WOTA TRUST MEETING WITH A TWIST

Normally the Trust meets at the home of the Chairman on a Monday evening, however to start our 2017 year, it was decided to convene our first meeting at the home of our Treasurer, Mr John Palmer – in Hamilton!

We carpoled for the trip and all agreed it was a very enjoyable day and a nice change from our evening gatherings.

Our Organ Works Guru, Neil Warrington, brought down one of the smaller chest units so that the newer Trustees could actually see first-hand, what it is that Neil and his team are dealing with, as they check each chest over for issues.



**WOTA Trustees from L-R: Neil Warrington, Maggie Cox, Jackie Crawford, Carol Neill, John Kleingeld & James Duncan.
(Missing John Palmer who was on the other side of the camera)**

The "Chest" is a huge wooden box in which sits the pipes for that particular rank or "voice". For example, let's choose the Trumpet rank, which has 61 pipes in it, one pipe for each note on the organ keyboard (or "manual" as the organ builders call them).

The chest has a "Top Board" with holes cut in it, and in these sit the individual pipes of the rank. Then we have the "Bottom Board" which has the motors, which are 2 blocks of wood with leather in between somewhat like a bellows, electro-magnets and the action – one set of these for each of those 61 pipes!

When the organ is playing, the Chest is filled with pressurised wind from the main Blower. Then, when the organist plays a note on the keyboard, if he has the Trumpet stop selected, then the electro-magnet will activate, letting the air inside the motor escape, collapsing one leather motor. This movement then collapses a larger and more powerful secondary motor, which opens a spring loaded valve called a pallet. This then lets the pressurised air inside the chest blow up the pipe and it "speaks"....or in lay terms, plays a note.

When the organist releases the key or note on the keyboard, the magnet closes, this causes the primary and secondary motors re-pressurise and expand. This then allows the pallet to close which cuts off the wind to the pipe and the pipe falls silent until next time. All of the above happens in a split-second with the organist barely perceiving any kind of delay.

We have 15 ranks of pipes – so 15 x 61 notes per rank means Neil and his "Tech Team" sure have their work cut out for them!!

2016 – IN REVIEW

Below are some clippings from the 2016 Chairman's report to the Wurlitzer Organ Trust of Auckland.

The Shows:

In March we introduced our *Friends of the Wurlitzer* members to what is to be our new home – The Playhouse Theatre in Glen Eden. This was done through our usual FOTW Club Afternoon, and gave all of us the opportunity to see the wonderful facilities that the Playhouse has at our disposal as hirers of the theatre.

In a bid to try and keep our 178 strong *Friends* membership engaged, despite the fact that the Wurlitzer pipe organ was in storage, we did present a couple of shows during the year, that were also open to the public, with artists that we knew would ensure good support.

Firstly in June, the UK's Chris Powell was in NZ for his bi-yearly concert tour and as we had cancelled our previously booked Sunday date because of the Hollywood going, Chris had managed to secure that date for a Sydney concert.

Consequently the only date available for Auckland was a Thursday and we took the gamble that it would work. Thankfully it did – just, although we did note the cries of concern from a large portion of the FOTW who were at work and could not attend! This nicely dispelled the opinion held by some, that the majority of the *Friends of the Wurlitzer* are retired!

Our second date was in October and was presented as part of Auckland Council's

“Heritage Festival”. For this show we booked Scott Harrison who was over at that time for a Tauranga event, and teamed him up with a local Dixie band known as

“B.B.C.”. As always, the combination of band and organ was a winner and this show was also well supported.



Cell phones are wonderful things – your Editor’s phone snapped this image of the BBC Dixie Band and Scott Harrison at the Allen TH300 Digital Theatre Organ during their October show at the Playhouse Theatre.

Mention of the two shows above brings me to the instrument used. We are very indebted to Roger Smith of MusicPlanet who made an Allen TH300 digital theatre organ available to us. This instrument came off the showroom floor and Roger along with his great team of staff, looked after all the movements by truck to and from the Playhouse Theatre.

It was hoped that being featured in these two events, might in itself create a sale of the instrument for MusicPlanet, however sadly, I don’t think this has been realised. (As yet!)

Although we broke even on both shows, our numbers were well down on our usual Wurlitzer pipe organ attendances, proving that we must get the Wurlitzer up and playing with as much haste as possible.

One final event was organised for the year, this one in November was just for the *Friends of the Wurlitzer* and it was a trip by coach down to Tauranga to visit our sister Wurlitzer organ, which like ours, was also celebrating her 90th birthday in October 2016. We managed to fill the coach and were hosted by the Tauranga Theatre Organ Society who provided lunch and refreshments, bringing their own club members in to make it a shared afternoon. A very nice way to conclude what was, a very much slimmed down event calendar for 2016.

Our biggest issue facing the Trust, until the Wurlitzer is playing again, is the cost of storing the instrument. Our shows have never really been money-makers so funding support has been key, in the success of our operation. However, no funding agency will fund storage costs, so we are in a critical

position with only enough funds to cover storage to the end of 2017, which will exhaust ALL our funds!

While the *Friends of the Wurlitzer* members have been spectacular in donating goodly amounts to aid these dark days, at over

\$1000 per month storage, the Trust must consider a way of acquiring funding to get us through to when the organ is hopefully moved to the Playhouse Theatre, later in 2017!

2015

AUDIENCE TOTAL FOR 2015	AVERAGE per SHOW
1445	240.8333

2016

AUDIENCE TOTAL FOR 2016	AVERAGE per SHOW
478	119.5

2015 saw six shows including the FOTW Club Afternoon, before the organ was removed from the Hollywood Cinema.

Promotion

With no budget available for promotion in the media, I continued to upload information and promotion for our shows to the *Eventfinda* website with us receiving hits up in the late hundreds for the two shows – when promoting our Wurlitzer shows, those hits go well over a thousand.. To promote in the NZ Herald would incur a cost of some \$2013 per show which in our current financial situation, cannot even be considered.

Some had said that even with the Wurlitzer out of action, we should still present shows on a “business as usual” basis. This would have been suicide for the Trust and I fought the proposal on the grounds that without the Wurlitzer, we would become just another “electronic organ group” of which the city has an overabundance. These groups struggle to pull in audiences of more than 50 or 60 but using local keyboard players, their costs are nowhere near as high as WOTA.

The Trust has established a high standard of presentation and we have a membership and a public who support us in good numbers because of this, so to do anything less would damage a reputation that has taken some years to earn. Hence we chose two good and popular artists and because of Roger Smith and his generosity with the Allen organ, we managed to scrape through.

Organ Works

Neil Warrington together with his trusty *Organ Tech Crew* has begun some remedial work on parts of the organ as advised by Julien Arnold at the time of removal from the Hollywood Cinema.

This work includes;

- Organ Chests. The 5 rank solo chest has been checked over. All pallets removed and inspected. All look in good condition. Motor leathers all good except 1 which is punctured and will be releathered. Pallet pins have been graphited.

The felt tips behind the motors are all lifting from the wind line end of the chest and will require regluing. Some brass inserts were loose and have been able to be rescued. There is a label inside the chest that says it was refurbished in 2004.

Once this is completed we will move onto the next chest which is a 4 rank main chest. This looks in good condition at first glance.

- New gaskets and valves have been ordered by Julien and will come from America. These are being donated by Julien and Mark Arnold. This will be very slow and precise work. There is in

the region of 800 valves to be replaced and reset.

- Neil has sent emails to several electrical firms to get a quote to overhaul the main blower. The motor for this blower is outboard and relatively new. It is the turbine which will require work. Most importantly the replacement of the main bearing.
- Work required for install of the Wurlitzer
 - Replace piano console vacuum pump
 - Check and repair all chests (seals, motors, pallets, felts and inserts)
 - Overhaul main blower (Turbine)
 - Re engineer organ console lift
 - Repair Harp hammers due to poor percussion (harp in situ, wind on)
 - Plug end bottom boards
 - Swell shades: replace bearings, modify motor positions to extend the blade openings to 85 degrees.

Meantime the organ is in the best and safest place at Kennards. With temperature control and no vermin, it certainly is costly, but it will result in an easy install at the Playhouse if we are not faced with repairing damaged items because of storage issues.

The Playhouse Theatre

The Waitakere Playhouse Theatre Trust are very committed to having the Wurlitzer organ at the Playhouse and took up the offer of an architect for the project, from one of our *Friends of the Wurlitzer* members, Mr Graham Upton.

Graham has worked closely with the WPTT bringing together two projects to make one – chambers for the Wurlitzer organ at the back of the stage and a multi-purpose function room over the top of the existing Green Room. Graham's drawings have now become detailed plans in readiness for submission to Auckland Council for resource and building consent.

However just before Christmas, a preliminary meeting was held with WPTT representatives, Graham and two heritage

advisers from the Council, to go over the proposal and advise if there would be issues from the heritage perspective when the formal application was made early in 2017.

It was pleasing to learn that the Council Heritage team had no objections to the proposal and they very keen to learn that the Wurlitzer organ, a part of Auckland's music and cinema heritage, was to be accommodated in the Playhouse project.

General

➤ Jan Nancekivell, continued to look after the critical roles of Concert Ticket Secretary and Membership Secretary for the Friends of the Wurlitzer covering the four events organised. While our FOTW numbers have dropped from the usual 200+ down to 186, it has been heart-warming to see their loyalty and commitment in doing what *they* can, to help the Trust with donations and support of events organised.

➤ We were greatly saddened to suddenly lose one of our number, when Trustee Dudley Neill passed away very suddenly, a huge blow to us all and particularly his wife Carol, our Trust Secretary. Then late in 2016 we lost one of our long-serving supporters and former Trustee, Peggy Hassall, known to all as our "Raffle Lady". Both these hard-workers will be sorely missed.



James Duncan

Despite a stormy year of highs and lows, the Trust itself is in good heart now, as we look forward to having the Wurlitzer organ installed in its new home later in 2017.

Chairman – Wurlitzer Organ Trust of Auckland.

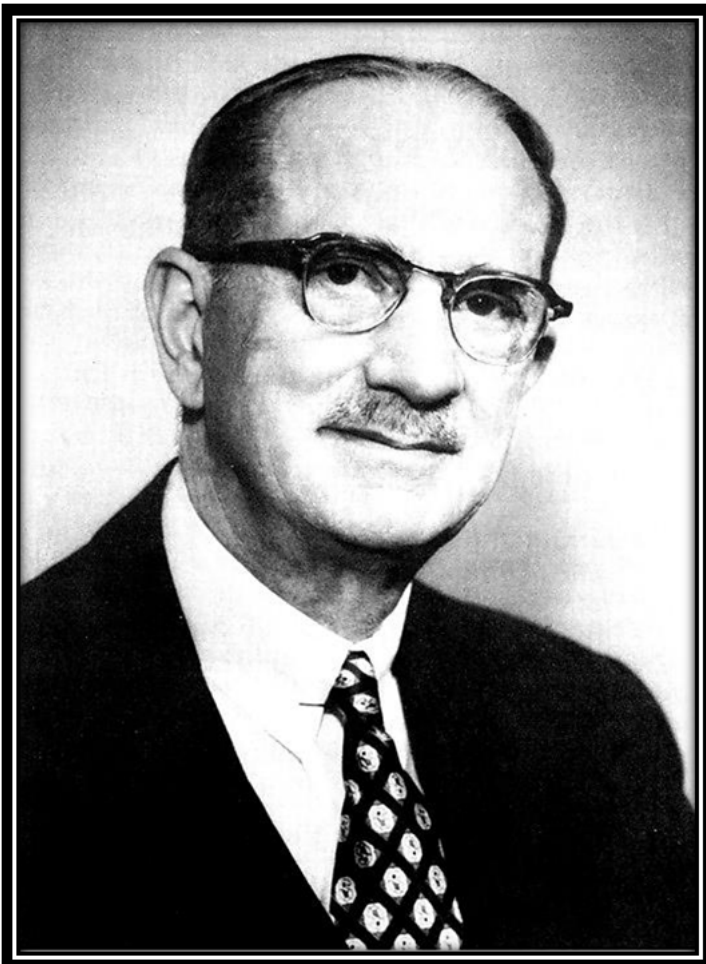
LOOKING BACK...

Whilst scrolling through the various articles and stories I've put together over the years for this humble publication, I stumbled over one I have not as yet used! I trust that you might find this wee gem of some interest....

John W.Landon, PH.D, is a respected historian in America of all things theatre organ, especially Wurlitzer. He has written many treatises on the subject and the man that helped put the Wurlitzer name up in lights – organist Jesse Crawford.

A few years back, one of John Landon's fascinating articles was featured in an issue of the American Theatre Organ Society journal "Theatre Organ", recounting an interview John had with Farny Wurlitzer. It was during the time that John Landon had decided that he was going to write a full-length biography of theatre organist Jesse Crawford as the basis of his Ph.D. dissertation at Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana. To accomplish this, he would need to interview some of the principal characters responsible for Crawford's career. Farny R.Wurlitzer of the company that bore his name was still living, and through a friend in the ATOS, contact was made and an interview granted. We now join this interesting story as written by John Landon and published in *Theatre Organ*.

Farny Wurlitzer specified that no tape be recordings be made of the interview, so I took along a stack of legal sized pads and wrote furiously during the interview, not wanting to miss a word. My interview with him took place on June 5, 1971.



Farny Wurlitzer lived in a spacious home in Kenmore, a suburb of Buffalo. He had lived at that address since 1954 with his wife, Grace, who passed away in 1968. Mr Wurlitzer was seated in a wheelchair, his lap covered by a robe. He welcomed me and said he would be happy to answer my questions. I had come prepared with quite a few of them. He was not a garrulous person, but he answered each of my questions briefly and succinctly. However after the interview had gone on for an hour or two, he became more talkative. His memory was clear. He could quote names, places and statistics with no hesitation.

Farny Wurlitzer.
(Courtesy of ATOS Archive)

He told me about his father, Rudolph Wurlitzer, founding the company in Cincinnati, and that he, himself, moved to North Tonawanda, New York in 1909 after his marriage to Grace Keene, because his father had determined that the company should move there. He had actually begun work for the company beginning in 1904, and he shared with me his memories of visiting San Francisco in 1906, just after the great earthquake and fire when the city was still in ruins.

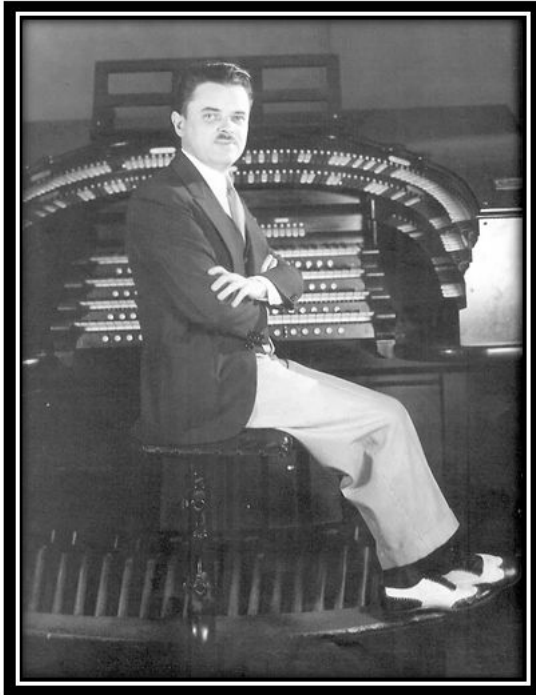
Fanny Wurlitzer worked for the company for 65 years. He was placed in charge of the North Tonawanda factory, and it was he who was the driving force behind the company's entrance into the theatre organ field. He said that the theatre organ had been "his baby" and he was delighted that it was being rediscovered at the time of my interview. (1971)

***The impressive front entrance and driveway to the Wurlitzer Factory,
North Tonawanda, New York State.
(Image courtesy of Wurlitzer Industrial Park)***



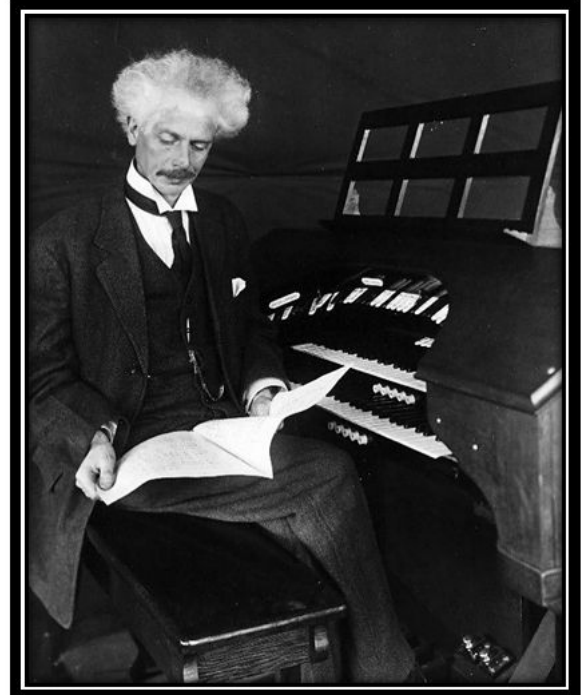
He spoke of Jesse Crawford as the "best salesman Wurlitzer ever had" and of the arrangement which the company made with Victor Records to put on the label of every organ record by Jesse Crawford the words, "Played on the Wurlitzer Organ". Thus, every record sold became a piece of Wurlitzer advertising.

**Jesse Crawford at the Wurlitzer organ
in the Recording Studio of the
New York Paramount Theatre**



ATOS ARCHIVES

**Robert Hope-Jones is considered to be
the inventor of the theatre organ.
His ideas – Wurlitzer’s resources!**



ATOS ARCHIVES

We spoke of Robert Hope-Jones, Farny was kind in his assessment of him. He said that Hope-Jones was a great inventor at heart, who never gave up tinkering, even when an organ was in the final stages of completion, he would have it unpacked adding greatly to the cost. He said that they finally had to bar Hope-Jones from the factory and put him on a pension.

Farny Wurlitzer’s keen eye for business kept many an employee’s pay-check coming in when other companies were going under during the Great Depression. When the sale of pipe organs declined, Wurlitzer purchased the patent rights in 1933 to an automatic recording-changing device. This led to a revival of interest in automatic musical instruments, and Wurlitzer led the way with their juke boxes.

The Wurlitzer company continued to prosper under Farny’s leadership (especially through the sale of pianos, and, later, electronic organs) when he became President in 1932 and Chairman of the Board in 1971. He retired from active duty at the factory in 1966 but was still connected to the company at the time of my interview.

Farny also spoke of his years of active community service. He was a major supporter of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra from its founding, was active in the Erie County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and was a member of Elks Lodge #360. He and his wife Grace established two Wurlitzer Foundation Scholarships in the amount of USD\$1500 each for two high school seniors who qualified through tests and were children or grandchildren of Wurlitzer employees.

Exactly 11 months after my interview, Farny Wurlitzer died at his home on May 6, 1972, at the age of 88. An era died with him. I am most grateful that I could talk with him in person about Wurlitzer theatre pipe organs and the greatest theatre organist of all time, Jesse Crawford.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES....

CONCERT TICKET ENQUIRIES & RESERVATIONS

JAN NANCEKIVELL – PH: 522-8944

OR E-MAIL: JANDENISE@XTRA.CO.NZ

**THE PLAYHOUSE THEATRE
15 GLENDALE ROAD, GLEN EDEN**



SUNDAY MARCH 19 – *Friends of the Wurlitzer "Club Afternoon"*

Opening our 2017 year, is our popular Club Doo. This year including a light afternoon tea, lucky door prizes and a presentation called "Always a Tram in Sight" a picture and video tribute to Auckland trams.

May – Negotiations underway for a visit by Melbourne entertainer Tony Fenelon



THE WURLITZER ORGAN TRUST OF AUCKLAND

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Mini Concerts every 4th Wednesday in the month with a featured theme are;

- Wednesday March 22ndth 10.30am – *Love Songs*
- Wednesday April 26th 10.30am – *War Songs*

Next OPKSA Concert:

- **Sunday 23rd April at 2.pm featuring "Len Hancy – Vocal & Entertainment".**
Contact Rob or Barbara on PH: 838-7346



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of AUCKLAND**

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##

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and CONCERT TICKETS:**

Mrs Jan Nancekivell

PH: 522-8944



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OF AUCKLAND**