

# Marian Burns MNZM

[www.marianburns.nz](http://www.marianburns.nz)

*Ehara tāku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini.*

*My strength does not come from myself alone, my strength comes from many.*



**Marian Theresa Davy** was born in *Eastern Bays District Hospital* on 21 January 1964. She is the youngest of 5 siblings; Brian, Steven, Colin and Karen. Her maternal grandfather Norman Clark had run away from home to join the circus as an acrobat and also played baritone in the *New Zealand Army*. While a Medic in WW1, gas in the trenches damaged his lungs forcing his early retirement. Sadly, he died three months after Marian was born.



Her father Max worked as a farm hand, butcher and a ship's galley chef for 33 years; Marian's parents separated just after she was born. She did not see much of him but years later she delightfully discovered that he could play the harmonica and sing. Her mother Norma played piano as a young girl, sang and even whistled a tune or two. Life was not easy in the early days bringing up five children, so her mum took a job in the Ladies department at *Farmers Trading Company* in Auckland to keep the family together.



As long as she can recall Marian loved music. As a young child she remembers vividly playing the custard pot with a wooden spoon, prancing around the lounge while listening to a *National Radio* music program. She giggles and says 'No wonder mum suffered from migraines – haaa!' Her siblings all learnt piano but Marian balked at that after seeing their red knuckles from being smacked with rulers. It didn't conform to her idea of learning. At aged 9 her late brother Brian took her to her first Country music club where she played '*Home on The Range*.'

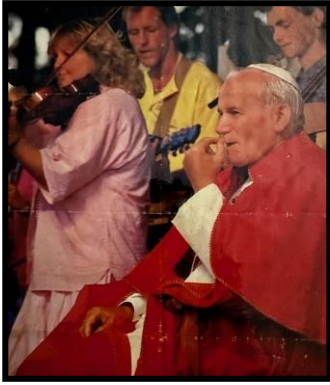
Marian remembers her reaction to hearing a recording of Strauss's *Blue Danube Waltz* – she fell in love with the strings! The picture on the back of the album showed a picture of an orchestra; she knew right away she wanted to play a violin. For her 5<sup>th</sup> birthday she asked for one but was given a doll instead! For her 6<sup>th</sup> birthday she again asked for a violin and this time her step father Jim Newman found her one and arranged for lessons at *Campbell's Bay Music Centre*. That was followed with private lessons from a school friend of his, June McIntyre, sister of renowned opera singer Sir Donald McIntyre.



Back in the 70's Marian's wildest dream was to play in an orchestra. In 1978 she joined the *North Shore Junior Strings*, held at the *Teacher's College* in Akoranga Drive. In 1979 she joined the *North Shore Youth Orchestra* directed by fellow Benny winner Gary Daverne. In 1981 she played in the *Auckland Secondary Schools Orchestra* under Michael McCallum and two years later she joined the *Auckland Symphony Orchestra* under Gary Daverne then went on to be a conductor of the *North Shore Youth Orchestra* and *The Bays Orchestra*. At 19 she started teaching the violin at *Belmont Music Centre* every Saturday for the next 14 years.

Marian attended school at *St John's Primary* in Mairangi Bay, and although she and Karen were a few years apart, they were asked to sing for various teachers. Her love of harmonising formed here. Music was by now a serious hobby but she also loved arts and crafts activities, which she still enjoys today. At *Carmel College* she enjoyed art, typing

and 'some' sport, but more especially discus and shot-put. She studied music and gained her *University Entrance*, leaving school in 1981.



In 1982 she studied Anthropology at *Auckland University* for a year while working part time at *Farmers Trading Company* selling babywear. In 1983 she was accepted into *Loreto Hall Catholic Teachers Training College* to start her teaching degree. Mid training the College closed and they were all transferred to *Auckland College of Education* where she met, in her words, 'The best music lecturer ever!' The late Lindo Frances. Marian majored in Music and has been a music specialist now at *Marina View School* since 1994 - celebrating thirty years this year. While attending *Loreto Hall* she played for the Pope John Paul II at his *Visit to the Youth Mass* in the *Auckland Domain* - a high light in her life.

Marian married Ray Burns in 1985. He was totally supportive in her classical music career and a great organiser; they were together for seventeen years. In 1986 she took up a teaching position at *St Joseph's School* in Takapuna. (Her first students back then are now turning 47 this year!)

It was 1992 that her future clearly opened up. Her sister Karen Davy-Perrett entered the *Auckland Country Music Awards* in the *Auckland Town Hall*. Backstage Marian viewed the trophy table and saw one little trophy that said *Best Country Instrumental*; on the back of it was her classical violin teacher's name, Cath Newhook. She experienced an 'Ah Ha!' moment and went, 'I want my name next to hers!'



Cath Newhook played in the *Gentle Annie Country Band* and invited Marian to a 'gig' (she'd never heard of a gig before); that was the pivotal moment. She decided she wanted to be a 'fiddler in a band'. In 1992 she joined the *North Shore Country Music Club*.



With a cassette of Colleen Trenwith's *Orange Blossom Special* in her *Walkman* and a sheet of manuscript paper, she worked her way through the violin part stopping and starting, jotting down the notes. Soon she could play the song off pat!

In 1993 she entered the *ACMA* competitions and on the day of the awards, while enjoying some down time, she wandered down Queen Street and saw a black hat in a shop window. It wasn't a typical 'country hat' but it would do very nicely. She tried it on, liked it, bought it and has worn it ever since. She first wore it that night on stage where her life changed forever. It's known now as her *signature hat!*

That year she not only won the *Best Country Music Instrumentalist* but also; *Senior Vocal Group*, *Best Entertainer Award* and *Overall Winner of the Auckland Awards*, and went on to win *NZCMA Country Music Entertainer of the Year* four months later. The NZ press became interested and solo work took off. She was asked to join *The Boot Scootin' Boogie Band* with members; Pat Olsen, Ross Simms and Dave Reid. They toured New Zealand extensively with Karen Dawson and the *Boot Scootin' Line Dancers*; the line dance craze had just hit New Zealand and was taking off.



Now she had a new dream; to perform in the South Island. In 1997 she was invited to perform at the *Golden Guitar Awards* in Gore. In 2010 the association added her to their *Hands of Fame* display; her hand prints in cement now share a place of honour with other New Zealand Country greats such as: Ray Columbus, Peter Posa, Eddie Low, Suzanne Prentice, Gray Bartlett, Kevin Greaves, *The Topp Twins* and Brendan Dugan, all of which have also been honoured by the *VAC*.

She opened for Ricky Skaggs in 1994, formed a make-shift band to open for *Dr. John* and also for the legendary Hank Thompson (*Blackboard of my Heart*). She was invited to the *Norfolk Island Country Music Festival* as a guest performer and two years later returned as headliner.



Marian founded *The Southern Cross Band* with Sel Nash, Jeannine Beatie and Keith McIntyre; playing for the next 25 years in dance clubs. In 1996 she joined the *McSweeney Brothers*, originally formed as a duo in 1995 by Phil McSweeney and Paddy Hallissey. It gained a residency at *Kitty O'Brien's Irish Pub* and soon grew into a four piece. Phil left for London in 1998 but left his name behind with the band. The current members are; Paddy Hallissey, Alastair Dougal, Eddie McIntyre and Marian.

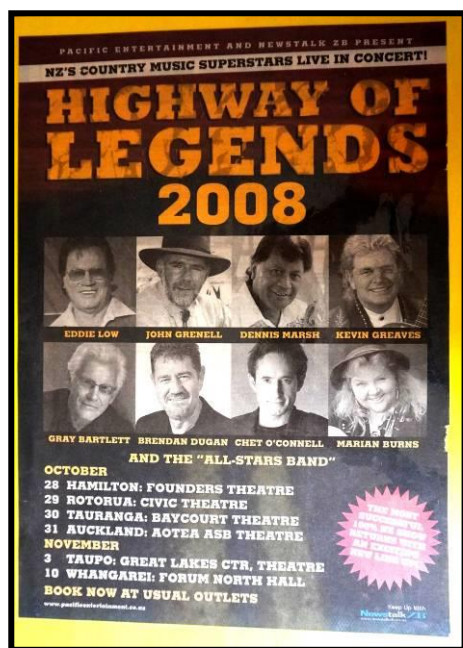


In 1992 she left *St Josephs* and two years later gained a position at *Marina View School*. She acknowledges their incredible generosity in allowing her to take time off to play around the world, in countries such as; France, England, America, Ireland, Belgium, Australia and of course, New Zealand.

Gigs she has enjoyed immensely include *Lakeside Rotorua*, produced by 2022 Benny recipient Chris Powley; touring three times with *The Topp Twins* throughout New Zealand and Australia; working for *Operatunity*, performing intermittently in their *Daytime*

*Concerts* and *Travel Club* ever since. In 2001 Susan Boland MNZM and John Cameron founded the *Operatunity* organisation.

Another string to Marian's bow was conducting massed choirs for the *Auckland Primary Principals' Association Auckland Music Festival* which has been running for 79 years. She notes, 'My favourite job in teaching - ever!' She conducted for 31 years until Covid put a stop to it! She adds, 'Devastating!'



Another high point was when she joined the 2008 *Highway of Legends* tour with five Benny recipients; Eddie Low MNZM (2009), Dennis Marsh MNZM (2019). Kevin Greaves (2017), Gray Bartlett MBE (2001) and Brendan Dugan (2018). Add to the mix Chet O'Connell, leading New Zealand guitarist/entertainer, and the fabulous voice of John Grenell – she quotes, 'It was an experience to die for'.

Her relationship with Ray Burns took a turn when she went 'Country' but she has retained 'Burns' as her stage name. In 2006 Marian re-married a gentleman called Phillip Sinclair, who has embraced the madness and spontaneity of Marian's whirlwind career.

In 2009 Marian had her first acting role in *RiverStone Blue Productions, The China Cup*, a New Zealand Film based in Temuka and Geraldine. (She laughs, 'Don't give up your day job Marian!!') Her original music was also accepted for the sound track.

She had been on the lookout for a new violin since 2004. When she was offered an 1806 Irish model she instantly fell in love with it. It's been with her ever since, her treasure, her baby! If she turns up anywhere with it, it's not because she wants to jam with the band, it's because it's never left in her car alone. Her Dublin-made *Perry* fiddle had its baptism by fire when in 2004 – thanks to Gray Bartlett – she got to play with the renowned *Chieftain's* in their concert at the *Aotea Centre*.

Marian is pretty rough on her bows; you may have noticed her pulling off broken strands now and then. She laughs, 'Makes for great dental floss!' Because of this she now owns 10 bows that are being re-haired constantly at a cost of \$100 each. Ouchy ouchy!





Marian was invited to a *Variety Artists Club* evening in the late 1990s by Gary Brown when the club used to meet at the *Strand Pub* in Parnell. They awarded her a *Scroll of Honour* in 2004, *Top Musician* in 2009, the *Agnew Award* in 2009 and the *Benny* in 2012. In 2010 she was awarded a *Life Time Achievement Award* and *Best Country Fiddle Album*, at the *Golden Fiddle Awards* at Tamworth, Australia and in 2018 she became a *Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM)* for services to Music.

Marian enjoys playing fiddle and ukulele but she also plays electric bass, the bodhran Celtic drum, acoustic guitar and she teaches drums. Talk about a multi-instrumentalist! Marian enjoys playing on stage with her talented sister Karen Davy-Perret and her duo partner Ken Strong. She jokes, '*Toucan* becomes Three-can! Haa!'

Since 2007 she has been touring New Zealand doing *Suzuki* violin enrichment courses, *Fiddle-tastic* and *Uke 'N' Fiddle* workshops teaching hundreds of young enthusiastic violinists, flautists, guitarists and cellists.

Her ukulele group *Mugs* was founded nine years ago; a group of keen adults who wanted to take up a new hobby; playing ukulele was it. They now confidently and competently play at various gigs around Auckland. Ultimately *Marian's Ukulele Group* is about having fun and spreading joy through music, which they believe is the strongest form of magic



Her composition *Beautiful Soldier* has been sung throughout the country at *ANZAC* and *Armistice* memorial services. It has been translated into sign language for the deaf, for use in schools by Sarah Mason.



**BEAUTIFUL SOLDIER**

Beautiful soldier so handsome and young  
 Beautiful soldier your life's just begun  
 Why have they called you  
 Oh what have they done  
 Beautiful soldier they've given you a gun  
 And what lies ahead cannot be undone  
 Beautiful soldier what did they say  
 Beautiful soldier as you went on your way  
 They told you they'd wait for you  
 They begged you to stay  
 They swore their love for you and God  
 How they prayed



