



THE INSIDERS NEW ZEALAND OPERA

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GO: Beautiful Huka Lodge, on the North Island at Lake Taupo, beside the Waikato River, will be transformed on a special Italian Opera Weekend (June 20-21). Five young performers, alumni of the New Zealand Opera School, will transport guests to the magical world of Italian opera, and the weekend will feature a five-course Italian dinner prepared by Sydney's Stefano Manfredi with Otago wines from Misha's Vineyard; hukalodge.co.nz.

SHOP: If you're looking for that elusive CD or DVD, then Marbecks in Auckland is the place to go. The store is celebrating its 80th year in the iconic Queen's Arcade on Queen Street. There's rack upon rack of great opera to choose from, but if you fancy a change you could always pick up some Leonard Cohen; marbecks.co.nz.

WALLOW: *Tosca* is a passionate opera of lust, revenge, sacrifice, jealousy and loyalty. New Zealand Opera brings Puccini's sublime music to Auckland from September 17 to 27 and to Wellington from October 10 to 17. Among a star-studded cast is superstar tenor Simon O'Neill, once a student of the NZ Opera School, and now a regular tutor, passing on his skills to the next generation; nzopera.com.

INDULGE: Before or after the opera, what better than a perfect pizza? At Scopa in Wellington the pasta, pizza dough, gnocchi and foccacia are lovingly hand crafted daily. This modern Italian cafe at the heart of vibrant Cuba Street draws on a long family heritage, with the Bresolin brothers offering the best in a Kiwi-Italian welcome; scopa.co.nz.

LEARN: Every January, Whanganui, on the North Island's west coast, is the place to be to learn all about

the art of opera singing and to meet up-and-coming stars. After 21 successful years, the New Zealand Opera School will be there again from January 4 to 17, 2016. Twenty students will be put through their paces by some of the best opera performers and coaches in the world, with public events including masterclasses across the fortnight, culminating in a gala concert at the Opera House on January 16; operaschool.org.nz.

Jonathan Alver has more than 25 years of experience in operatic, theatrical, screen and major event production in New Zealand, Britain and the US.

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