

## Philip Humphrey Garland QSM (1942–2017)

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The late Phil Garland was one of New Zealand's most significant folklorists and folk musicians. For over 50 years, he dedicated himself to collecting and promoting folk material from New Zealand sources, often reshaping or reinterpreting it in a body of work that encompasses LPs, books, radio documentaries, and an extensive stage career.

Raised in the South Island city of Christchurch, Garland was drawn into musical activities from a young age including being a member of several local rock 'n' roll bands. These early experiences instilled a level of professionalism evident across all his subsequent work. An interest in folksong emerged around 1964, after exposure to the folk scene then blossoming at local coffee bars and Canterbury University. A subsequent trip to England convinced him to specialise in performing New Zealand material. In 1967, he established the Christchurch Folk Centre venue and the following year helped form the Christchurch Folk Club.

Phil Garland's folklore collecting activity was prompted partly by a need for performance material. There had been some collecting of New Zealand folksong done in the 1950s, by Rona Bailey, Neil Colquhoun, Les Cleveland and others, but only a limited amount of this material was readily available in 1964. He was also encouraged by Frank Fyfe, an Australian folklorist who emigrated in 1964 and later founded the New Zealand Folklore Society (NZFLS). Garland established a Christchurch branch of the Society in 1967 and conducted field trips to the Canterbury, Otago and West Coast regions. These trips resulted in field recordings of songs, instrumental music, verse, yarns and oral history. From the 1970s onwards, Garland's preferred collecting approach was to elicit material at concerts, through media appearances and local networks. He formed lasting working relationships with a number of informants, including the "folk poets" Ross McMillan and Joe Charles.

Among the more significant local songs collected by Garland were oral variants of 'The Life of a High Country Shepherd', 'The Dying Bushman', and 'The Old Mud Hut'. However, along with Fyfe and other members of the NZFLS, Garland soon established that the repertoire of traditional

English-language New Zealand songs—strictly-defined—was relatively small. His attention subsequently focused on documenting parodies and rhymes, local songs, rural legends and stories, humour and vernacular language, together with gathering historical material preserved in newspapers, songsters and ephemera. This body of folklore is usefully compiled in the book, *Faces in the Firelight: New Zealand Folk Song & Story* (Steele Roberts, 2009).

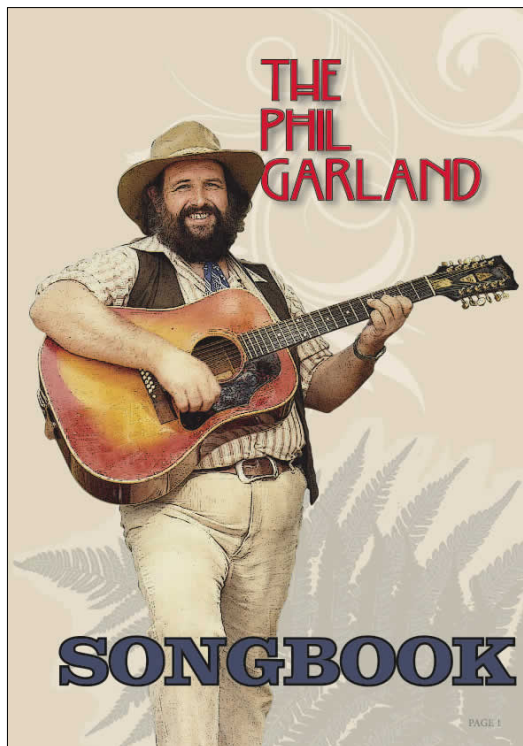


Figure 1. Cover of Phil Garland's *The Phil Garland Songbook* (Kiwi Pacific, 2015).

From the 1970s onwards, Garland's principal outlets for sharing the results of his collecting and research were live performances, festival workshops and recordings, principally for the Kiwi Pacific label. Much of his repertoire is collated in the song books *The Singing Kiwi* (Willy Wag, 1996) and *The Phil Garland Song Book* (Kiwi Pacific, 2015). Best known as a solo performer, Garland was also a mainstay of various bush bands over the years, such as the Canterbury Crutchings Bush and Ceilidh Band, and the Canterbury Bush Orchestra, becoming well-versed in arts of dance calling. Garland relocated from New Zealand to Australia in 1987, where he continued to make a living as a working musician and singer, contributing especially to the Perth folk scene. These experiences—which included immersion in

the Australian folksong tradition—gave Garland added insight into the shared colonial heritage of the two countries.

Returning in 1996, Garland re-established his musical career in New Zealand with a newfound confidence in original song-writing. Later albums are noteworthy for his many well-crafted ballads accompanied, as always, by his signature 12-string guitar finger-picking style. Garland also commenced the task of organising his extensive archives of papers, recordings, photographs and ephemera. In 2013, he donated these to

Alexander Turnbull Library, part of the National Library of New Zealand, where they can be accessed under the Phil Garland collection (MS-Group-2209). He was awarded the Queen's Service Medal for services to folk music in 2014, fitting recognition for a lifetime of work encouraging local folk musicians, helping organise the infrastructure of the folk scene, and preserving and promoting New Zealand's folk heritage. In March 2017, just as he was preparing for a final national tour, Phil Garland passed away. He will be sorely missed.

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