

## Interview with Mark Leuthard – the Engineer

The countdown is on for New Plymouth Operatic's latest production, *Miss Saigon*, which premieres at the TSB Showplace on October 8. The cast have been in rehearsals since early May, including New Plymouth man Mark Leuthard, who has landed the leading male role of 'The Engineer' in the production.

"The Engineer is a complex character with multiple personalities" says Mr Leuthard. "One minute he's a nasty piece of work, the next, a happy go lucky, witty rascal. He's the owner of a shady after hours club called "Dream Land" and one day dreams of making it to America where he can set up business and live out the American Dream. He moves through the show with Kim using her to try and not only make money but piggy back a ride and citizenship to the U.S"

Leuthard has a plethora of experience to draw upon as he prepares for what he describes as his most challenging role ever. *Miss Saigon* represents the 17<sup>th</sup> show Mark has performed in for New Plymouth Operatic. After debuting in 'Peter Pan' in 1991 as one of the 'lost boys' he has included amongst his credits some heavyweight leading roles including 'Buddy' in *The Buddy Holly Story*, Mickey Johnstone in *Blood Brothers*, Rooster in *Annie*, *Thenardier* in *Les Miserables* and most recently The Rum Tum Tugger in New Plymouth Operatic's critically acclaimed 2007 season of *Cats*. Of his latest role in *Miss Saigon* Mark says "The closest thing to this role I've played would have to be *Thenardier*, the nasty but loveable (sound familiar?) bar-keeper in *Les Miserables*. I love the comical parts in shows but even more so, I love the bad guy. So playing characters who are the best of both really draws me to audition for them."

However, even people as naturally talented as Mark sometimes miss out on shows they audition for "Yeah, I've missed out on a few" he says " I was told I was too young to be in *Grease* and I missed out on the first *Les Miserables* when they were auditioning (in 1994). I was gutted!"

Mark's tells us his 'secret' to performing success is to learn your part as quickly as possible. "Getting your words down, including your music allows you to concentrate on your movement or dancing a little more and develop the details of your character. The more time you have to spend on refining your part, the better."

Mark's involvement with New Plymouth Operatic is not solely focused onstage. In 2008 he stood, and was successfully elected to New Plymouth Operatic's Board of Management "It's great being involved in the day to day running of a society you're so passionate about. Making decisions that influence where the society heads in the future is important and very exciting. Especially deciding on and putting together the details of a new show." He says.

As we speak with Mark his love of New Plymouth Operatic and the people involved is clear. "Operatic is one of those societies that becomes like a family. Especially when you've done it as long as me (18 years). You meet new people every show and get to catch up with old friends. New Plymouth Operatic has one of the best societies in New Zealand so making it into one of their shows is an awesome achievement and one anybody should be proud of.

As time has moved on NPOS has moved to another level with it's professionalism and production quality. Mostly due to dedicated members who put in countless hours behind the scenes. We are a very lucky city to have these people but we always need more. Great local support also helps. It's this support that ensures more great shows come to New Plymouth every year."

Outside theatre, Mark certainly breaks the mould of what many view as the stereotypical actor. He's is an active musician and sportsman, and has a successful career in banking. "I have been with BNZ for nearly two years now and I'm the Manager the Hawera Branch. I have been banking for 8 years in total including here and overseas. I love my job and the support I get from BNZ and my staff. They are all coming to see the show so I'd better give them something to talk about the Monday after! Preferably some good stuff."

Outside of work Mark says 'I'm very keen on Captaining my cricket team (New Plymouth Old Boys) during the Summer and I perform with my partner Krystal and mate Shaun Campbell in our small band, 3 Piece Sweet. I have played in other well known bands around New Plymouth including, Wishing Well, The Shine and Uncovered. Great for keeping my voice strong in between shows!"

However, despite nearing two decades as a performer, Mark still admits to a few Opening Night jitters "I'm always nervous Opening Night and mostly the opening 5 minutes of any performance. More so when my friends or family are in the audience. A few nerves are good though. They keep you sharp and on your game."