

FESTIVAL OF ROSES POETRY AWARD - 2010

It's my pleasure to be part of the Festival of Roses, and I commend the festival committee for including a poetry competition in the activities. The arts thrive with such support, and poetry and roses go well together. We are reminded of Robbie Burns' famous poem, 'My love is like a red red rose, that's newly sprung in June.'

Poetry is perhaps the most subjective of all literary forms, and there are no rules. Modern poetry is no longer bound by diction, stanza length or the need to rhyme. Even definitions vary a great deal. Elbert Hubbard said, 'Poetry is the bill and coo of sex,' John Cage wrote, 'I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry,' and Robert Burton's opinion was, 'all poets are mad.' More positive, and I think more accurate, are the opinions of Shelley and Coleridge. The first said, 'Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds,' and the latter said, poetry is 'the best words in the best order.'

And of course not all poets are remembered for being talented. The 19th Century Scottish poet William Topaz McGonagall is famous as the worst British poet ever. As you will hear some good poetry this evening, it's salutary to have a taste of McGonagall for contrast. He wrote the following four lines in praise of a local doctor -

He told me at once what was ailing me
He said I have been writing too much poetry
And from writing poetry I would have to refrain
Because I was suffering from inflammation on the brain.

As an antidote to that, here's a short and well known poem from our own James K. Baxter.

HIGH COUNTRY WEATHER

Alone we are born
And die alone;
Yet see the red-gold cirrus
Over snow-mountain shine.
Upon the upland road
Ride easy, stranger:
Surrender to the sky
Your heart of anger.

In this Festival competition there were nearly 40 entries, and they showed a considerable variation in theme and language. The weaker ones had a tendency to sentimentality and dated poetic language, but almost all had the virtues of sincerity and close observation. I would commend all those people who entered, because unlike many I'm sure who proposed to do so but faltered, they persevered, created something, and met the deadline. My congratulations to those who were highly commended – their poems are 'An Angel On My Shoulder,' 'Mother,' and 'Everything's Coming Up Tuis and Roses.'

When I judged the entries I had no knowledge of the authors, and found later that both the first and second placed poems are by the same person. I take heart that at least that shows consistency in judging and the writing! You have will hear the three winning poems, so I need to say little concerning them.

THIRD PLACE - GLOBAL WARNING – Jan Hill

One of the shortest poems entered, but powerful in its compression and the philosophic reflection on an everyday observation.

SECOND PLACE – WANAKA HOLIDAY – Ruth Arnison

An unselfconscious poem with colloquial, yet appropriate and carefully chosen language, and showing a humorous and perceptive understanding of teenagers and family dynamics.

FIRST PLACE – IN MY UNCLE'S FOOTSTEPS – Ruth Arnison

A moving poem that succeeds in the difficult task of conveying powerful and personal emotion without lapsing into sentimentality. The one line conclusion is especially effective. A very worthy winner of the competition. Congratulations.