

# Walking to their own tune

By **HEATHER MACKENZIE**

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Harpist Michelle Doyle and violinist/vocalist Michael O'Donnell are bringing their blend of a classical, Celtic and jazz type vibe to the Mt Hutt Memorial Hall tonight.

The Australian musicians are in New Zealand hiking the 3000km Te Araroa trail and playing at various venues along the way, to launch their first album *A Walking Place* and to raise money for osteoporosis research.

Diagnosed with the condition at 24, Doyle knows how important it is to maintain a positive outlook and to keep physically active.

"When we first started the hike I didn't know if I would make it all the way to Invercargill, but here we are in Methven with 740km left to go and I'm thinking I might just make it."

While Doyle always knew the hike was a good plan, partner O'Donnell took a bit of convincing, but once she put the idea of performing along the way in his head, he quickly changed his mind and thought it was a great idea.

"I find the hiking very meditative. Two weeks of walking is enough to push the rubbish out of my head and to make room for the music to come," he said.

Doyle and O'Donnell may be walking the length of the country carrying their packs, but their instruments have opted for a cushier option.

The harp and violin are being transported ahead of them via a network of strangers offering to carry the instruments to the next town, or if that fails, a courier.

At their concert in Nelson Doyle asked the audience if anybody was heading south or knew of anyone leaving Nelson soon who would have room for a harp and violin.

"A friend of Methven's Viv Barrett was in the audience and she offered to transport them to Methven for us."

After the concert the logistics of getting the special cargo south were worked out.

"She told us that she wouldn't be home when we planned to drop them off, but she'd leave the door open so we didn't have to leave them outside.

"She was true to her word. When we arrived the door was unlocked so we left them in the lounge with a thank you note."

They both agreed that the kindness they have been shown in New Zealand has been outstanding. O'Donnell said they have not experienced any issues around

sending their instruments south with strangers.

"The harp is so big, so I am sure if it did go missing someone in New Zealand would pretty soon notice it," he said.

Doyle said she was more worried about the airlines damaging her harp case. She said she's witnessed baggage handlers literally throwing it in the past.

Prior to leaving Australia the duo had booked their 20 nationwide performance venues nine months in advance and at that stage Methven didn't make the cut as the Mid Canterbury town is not officially on the trail map.

The pre-arranged concert dates certainly give them a schedule to work to, but they have also built in plenty of rest days for practising, meeting locals and to eat good meals.

So when Sue Stewart from the Mt Hutt Memorial Hall contacted them to see if they would play in Methven on the way through, they thought 'why not, we have the time'.

"It was really good timing as the Wanaka gig had just cancelled on us, plus we were coming to Methven anyway," O'Donnell said.

For more information on the concert or the musicians go to [www.mickeymichelle.com](http://www.mickeymichelle.com)



Harpist Michelle Doyle and violinist/vocalist Michael O'Donnell are taking a break from the Te Araroa trail to perform in Methven tonight.

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