



Jennifer Ward-Lealand.

Height 180 cm

Master Of Ceremony Biography
JOHNSON&LAIRD

It's hard to imagine the First Lady of New Zealand theatre, Jennifer Ward-Lealand, in a clown suit, but a young actor has to earn a crust somehow. The red nose and floppy shoes of her community theatre days are a far cry from her stage garb these days. Her statuesque frame is usually draped in floor-length frocks as she channels old-style glamour in her cabaret shows.

The award-winning actress has a list of performance credits that would make the Encyclopaedia Britannica seem short. She's toured New Zealand and offshore with Harry Sinclair and Don McGlashan in music /theatre group The Front Lawn, starred to international acclaim in the local melodrama film Desperate Remedies, was a core-cast member of the high-rating Australian comedy sketch show Full Frontal, and played Isobel Kearney for a year-long stint on local soap Shortland Street. Latterly she's directed theatre, especially musicals and the accomplished singer presents her own shows, Falling in Love Again and The Look of Love, Evocative/Provocative, at festivals and venues in New Zealand and offshore.

Most recently she starred in the Silo Theatre's hit production Brel, to five-star reviews.

Elegant yet down-to-earth, Jennifer is in demand as an MC and host at corporate events. Her warmth and wit have carried the crowd at the Montana Book Awards three times, and she's hosted a range of events held by Auckland convention centre The Edge. She and husband, fellow thespian Michael Hurst, also make an annual pilgrimage to the Xena: Warrior Princess convention in the US, to perform a dual cabaret show to adoring fans (both appeared in the popular TV series).

If you're invited to Jennifer's for tea (she makes a good date and cinnamon scone), be careful where you sit. A fan of mid 20th century furniture, she counts her collection of Eames dining chairs, and her two black Barcelona chairs as some of her most prized possessions.

Jennifer played piano as a child, but caught the drama bug and let her keyboard skills slide. She's now on her third attempt to pick up where she left off, aiming to one day accompany herself when she sings. You'll also find a guitar and a ukulele lurking somewhere in the house; ask to hear her rendition of Five Foot Two.

A self-confessed neatnik, Jennifer loves a tidy desk. She's no procrastinator either. As well as all their other work, she and Michael run three companies and a household and Jennifer has never had a 'late'notice yet.

The busy mother of two also manages to squeeze weekly te reo classes and choir practice into her hectic schedule. An avid reader, she frets if there are less than two or three books stacked on her bedside table. She admits she's no thrill seeker, so don't expect to see her on the end of a bungy cord. Instead she gets her kicks from her boys'daily drum practice and a good shot of pre-performance adrenalin.

A driving force on the local theatre scene, Jennifer was a founding board member of Auckland's Watershed theatre, is president of New Zealand Actors Equity, and serves as a trust board member of Silo Theatre. She and Michael are patrons of the Auckland Performing Arts Centre (TAPAC), so it's no surprise she was honoured with the title Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for her services to the theatre and the community.

Testimonials.

The event was amazing and Jennifer was amazing! She is truly the warmest most generous&supportive person I've had the pleasure to know. Our event was successful because of her warm spirit, her professional delivery of our entrants show stories, and her generosity in overseeing everyone 's needs including working with me, choreography&sound, &audience. She is a shining star!

- Annie Tatton - Shoes Extravaganza Nov 2017

"The Leadership Summit was a fantastic success. Jennifer Ward-Lealand is a high quality professional who delivered an exemplary service of facilitating with style and heart felt commitment which the audience was overwhelmed with and fell in love with. I cannot express in any amount of words how deeply honoured we all are to have had Jennifer be part of our Inaugural Leadership Summit. Jennifer has cemented a place within all our hearts and also within the Te Wananga o Aotearoa whanau. "

- James Burns, TWoA - TWOA LEADERSHIP SUMMIT - MC -

LEXUS SONG QUEST PRE-SHOW EVENT - MC - JULY 2014

"Jennifer was an absolute pleasure to work with ...she was the perfect fit given her affinity with the performing arts industry, providing a wonderful blend of professionalism, humour, industry knowledge, and empathy for performers and judges alike. Meetings and rehearsals in advance of the event were seamless –nothing was a problem for her–and not only did she do a fantastic job as MC but when not on stage she effortlessly mingled with customers at every opportunity which they really appreciated. Jennifer was exceptionally well received by guests and our executive team and I have no doubt we will be calling on her services again in future.
"Coby Duggan, Lexus NZ

NZ INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS - MC - 24 MAY 2013

"I am delighted to be able to write a reference for Jennifer Ward-Lealand. As the Master of Ceremony for the NZ Institute of Architects I found her to be extremely professional, organised and she kept the night flowing smoothly and on time. Jennifer also sang during the event with the entertainer. All attendees at the event enjoyed it immensely. It was a please to work with someone of Jennifer's calibre and I would have no hesitation to recommend her for future work. " - Daryne Forum Point 2

MONTANA NZ BOOK AWARDS - MC

Testimonials continued...

"For the third time in as many years you 've been the MC at the Montana New Zealand Book Awards and as usual you carried things off with warmth, charm and consummate professionalism. I've appreciated your attention to detail in this work behind the scenes. On stage a good facilitator of what is always a fairly complex range of awards, keeping the focus on the finalists and winners and ensure things are moving crisply and efficiently. " - Sponsorship Manager|Pernod Ricard New Zealand

NZ ARCHITECTURE AWARDS - MC

"Exceptional MC 's are a rare breed, particularly those that can deal with complex content, while being engaging, funny, and totally composed. Your professional approach and your willingness to accommodate all our requests, and the generosity of your time meant the Awards went off without a hitch. Jennifer, you are truly outstanding in what you do and I am sure that we will see you back to hosting more of the Institute 's events. " - New Zealand Architecture Awards Events Manager

"Elegant and sophisticated, down-to-earth and drop dead gorgeous, entertaining and"up"for the adventure, Jennifer totally"got"what the evening was about - raising funds to help women in need as they enter or return to the workforce. We felt like we'd won the lottery when Jennifer agreed to participate in the Celebrity Waiters 'event. " - Executive Manager Dress for Success Auckland

"Jennifer seamlessly segues her thespian persona into a new role as a corporate MC of style. Jennifer has undertaken several such roles for THE EDGE. Jennifer's preparation was flawless for each of the events and her sense of what each of the events required to create the right sense of flow and occasion was hugely successful. I have no hesitation in recommending Jennifer, where wit, elegance and an easy and enjoyable sophistication are the order of the day. " - Chief executive, The Edge

"Jennifer was a dream to work with; she brought glamour, grace and poise to the event as well as warmth and that innate ability to connect 'with a diverse audience. All of my people loved working with her!" - Auckland City Council