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Urale, Brandt, Daniels, Rajan, Tu'u and *Wheeler's Luck*

No 52
SPRING 2017

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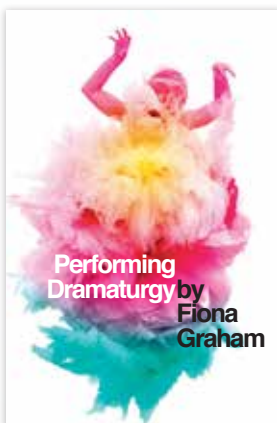
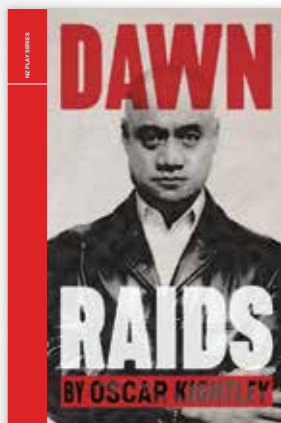
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Daffodils, a Bullet Heart Club production featuring Todd Emerson,
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Photo: Garth Badger.



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DIRECTOR'S WORD

ISSUE *No 52*

Space and resource plus people. The key things that we need to make theatre. Whether it is a hall, a park, a prison, a parking building or a large scale lyric theatre; whether we are a subsidised professional theatre company or a community organisation; whether we utilise props or work with nothing but the body, we all need a space and resources to make theatre happen. This *Playmarket Annual* focuses on a diverse range of places and modes of theatre creation and presentation.

Flexibility, possibility, and practicality are all canvassed. What are the factors when designing and creating for different venues? What are the considerations for touring?

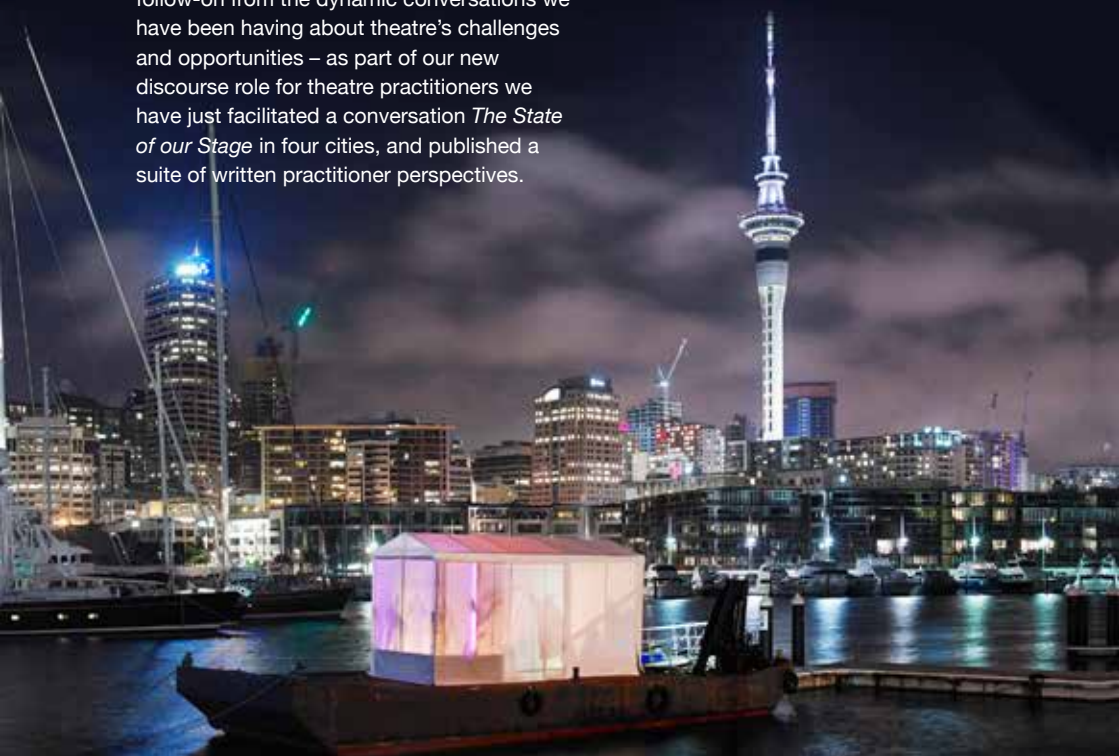
We include discussion on what has happened historically to ensemble company structures, and in-house playwright residencies within theatres. This feels particularly relevant as follow-on from the dynamic conversations we have been having about theatre's challenges and opportunities – as part of our new discourse role for theatre practitioners we have just facilitated a conversation *The State of our Stage* in four cities, and published a suite of written practitioner perspectives.

Our ongoing 'Why I Wrote the Play I Wrote' sections feature plays that were created through collaborative processes. Elsewhere, creators like Sam Trubridge, Louise Tu'u and Julia Croft write about their experiences. The production calendar highlights how much NZ work is being presented.

Mark Amery has commissioned a particularly fine range of pertinent and thought-provoking articles and I am grateful for his ongoing commitment to editing the Annual. My thanks also to the Playmarket staff, in particular Salesi Le'ota for his contributions to this publication. Playmarket is also grateful to First Sovereign Trust Limited for providing funding to assist in the printing of this edition.

Murray Lynch

Director, Playmarket



PLAYMARKET ANNUAL

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NEW ZEALAND
PLAY AND PLAYWRIGHT

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COVER IMAGE: Kathryn Burnett and other
practitioners at *State of Our Stage*, Te Haukainga,
Wellington. Image: Philip Merry.



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Louise Tu'u locates her work's audience

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Ropable* by Ross Gumbley and Allison Horsley, The Court Theatre. Image: Nick King; *Fire in the Water, Fire in the Sky* by Miria George, Tawata Productions, Kia Mau Festival. Image: Andrew Strugnell; *Peer Gynt (Recycled)* by Eli Kent, Auckland Theatre Company. Image: Michael Smith; *Tiki Taane Mahuta* created by Tanemahuta Gray, music by Tiki Taane, Taki Rua and Aotearoa Aerial Theatre. Image: Philip Merry; *The Streaker* by Gregory Cooper, Centrepoint Theatre. Image: Alexander Hallag.

PAGE THREE IMAGE: *The Floating Theatre*, Winning Productions, Auckland Fringe Festival. Image: Victoria Birkinshaw.

Why I Wrote the Play I Wrote

MAKERITA URALE

on Frangipani Perfume

Frangipani Perfume was born out of my memories and images as a child growing up in a village on Savai'i, Samoa and the life of my family and 'aiga as immigrants in New Zealand. The story is about three sisters who clean the toilets in office buildings. Their lives also exist in another world – a world of dreams, memories and yearnings of a better life in the land of milk and honey.

Many things came together for *Frangipani Perfume*. The work seemed to pour out of me like an unstoppable wave, dragging others along, on its rushing tide.

I had been working as a producer for the New Zealand Festival. I became obsessed with theatre and opera and blew my savings to travel to Europe to see more, especially Russian theatre which I felt had an ancient depth and history. In Moscow, I watched a historical work with older actors whose consummate performances struck me deeply. I couldn't understand a word, yet the experience filled my mind and imagination. The simple set was high-backed chairs. This stuck with me in the vision for *Frangipani Perfume*. Over the years, the set has been three high-backed metal chairs, designed by Tony Rabbit for a show and bought by a flatmate at a Downstage

Theatre props sale. Lighting, choreography and direction did the rest.

I remember the hectic intensity and energy of the creative process for our first season at BATS in 1998. I was writer and producer, the director Erolia Ifopo. Erolia's conceptual thinking and imagination made her the only person I could trust to guide these early writing steps and allow me to realise a non-conventional creative process.

Because my vision for the work was full of imagery, rhythm and physical compositions, we needed a choreographer to interpret some scenes. Teokotai Pитай grasped my vision and made it work, brilliantly. The original cast was Dianna Fuemana, Joy Vaele and my sister Sima Urale. Jen Lal was lighting designer and Shigeyuki Kihara made the costumes. The work has gone on to seasons in Auckland, Canada, Australia, and Samoa, and play readings in Toronto and New York. Directors have included Hori Ahipene, Rachel House and Fiona Collins, and other actors Anapela Polataivao, Fiona Collins, Goretti Chadwick and Nancy Brunning. Designer Sean Coyle came on board after the first season with friend Clare Bowden, who owns Mandatory on Cuba Street, designing wardrobe for the five city tour in Canada.

LIKE AN UNSTOPPABLE WAVE, DRAGGING OTHERS ALONG



I don't think the actors really understood what I envisioned until the first opening night. It lacked conventional structure, and scenes cut with lightning changes in a way that was as unpredictable as my writing process.

Yet I knew there was a method to my madness. It was probably more like the editing of a film than a stage play – closer to the experience of a poem. You kind of think you know what it means, but that it could also mean something else.

My parents came to opening night. When we arrived home afterwards my father asked my mother, "What's wrong with our daughters?" My older sister, who saw inklings of herself in the oldest sibling Tivi in the play, only opened up about the play years later. I could see the bewilderment in her eyes, puzzlement of what it all meant, and yet her also trying to support my creative vision. I told her it was all made up, but formed from personal experience.

I remember talking at theatre classes at Victoria University, the students asking me what the different scenes meant, looking at me for answers. I told them: "If you think that's what it means, then you are probably right."

The work is probably more honest than me, more honest with my feelings and

senses when I wrote it, than how I am now – intellectualising about it. It is an expression of my feelings and experiences, of what was going on in my thoughts at the time, created with people I trusted and respected.

As we grow older, I think we also outgrow our work. I remember introducing a reading at La Mama Theatre in New York. I felt paranoid with an American audience. I told them:

"Do you know what it's like when you have a favourite skirt? Well, this was my skirt many years ago, but now I feel like I have long outgrown it, but it continues to be seen for what it is."

From the responses of different audiences, I saw that they were being invited to a story within a story within a story. Some could only see the first layer, and maybe the next. But the people who saw through the many layers to its true depths – to a kind of truth experienced through memories and emotions – I felt were mostly the Pacific women and girls I have met after the show. Their responses were different. A quiet knowingness. A gentle thank you. A shared bonding of a common experience as Pacific women.

ABOVE: *Frangipani Perfume* by Makerita Urale, Leeward Community College, Hawai'i, USA. Image: Jonathan Reyn.



AUCKLAND

BY ROSABEL TAN

I asked someone recently how they were finding the theatre in Tāmaki Makaurau. They'd been away for more than a decade, and had returned to take on a senior role in the industry. Their reply? "Poor." Not in quality, but in resource: we do a lot with not very much, and – they observed – we're proud of that, for better and for worse.

They're right. How amazing was it that after missing out on funding, the Auckland Fringe still happened? But only because Zanetti Productions (and every Fringe performer and practitioner) decided to work their unliveably-waged asses off to make sure it did.

Without it, we may have never had *Rushes* – that sensational collaboration between choreographer Malia Johnston, visual artist Rowan Pierce, composer Eden Mulholland, set designer John Verryt and lighting designer Jo Kilgour. Featuring more than 25 performers, this late-summer surprise at Auckland Live brought to life a haunted house (in the style of David Lynch) in the unassuming Lower NZI Room.

Without the Fringe, we may have never stood on the roof of the abandoned old Council building with an eight-year-old, talking about their hopes for the city's future (Andy Field's *Lookout*). We may have never clambered through darkness onto a glowing barge on the Whau river (Stephen Bain's *The Floating Theatre*), and we may never have had the opportunity to reflect on – and be disturbed, angry, saddened – by rape culture and the insidious ways it continues to influence and impact the lives of countless people (Eleanor Bishop's *Jane Doe*).

Our emerging practitioners are doing exciting, ambitious work, and they're supported as

best they can by our venues – but there's still a need for stronger pathways to support bigger work in bigger spaces, otherwise that gap between emerging and established will only continue to widen.

Other great news: Basement became a CNZ Tōtara organisation this year. So well-deserved and – more importantly – their ongoing mahi reflects their dedication to developing an inclusive space for performers and audiences alike. Jason Te Kare's Matariki programming continues to be an annual highlight, and their 2017 resident company Fafswag kicked off Pride with *Femslick*.

Using vogue culture to share trans and queer experiences, it was an electric, wall-shaking, gravity-bending performance that nobody will forget anytime soon.

Two of the strongest works in 2016 were notably from Wellington, both at Q Theatre. The Conch's *The White Guitar* and A Slightly Isolated Dog's *Don Juan* were totally different but reminded us what great theatre can do: catch your breath, squeeze your heart, and make the world feel that little bit smaller, friendlier, bearable. Also a highlight: FCC's revival of Tusiata Avia's *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt* at Māngere Arts Centre. Under the direction of Anapela Polataivao with an ensemble cast, the text was given revitalised power and wove in a remarkable end (I was sitting next to a young girl in the front row, who was so frightened she clambered over the seats to escape).

And out at TAPAC, Prayas Theatre staged their most ambitious work yet. *Swabhoomi: Borrowed Earth* under the direction of Ahi Karunaharan drew together a selection of



A YEAR FOR THEATRE GROWING UP

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

A Lion in the Meadow and Other Stories by Margaret Mahy, adapted by Tim Bray, Tim Bray Productions.
Image: David Rowland.

When Sun and Moon Collide by Briar Grace-Smith, Auckland Theatre Company.
Image: Michael Smith.

Swabhoomi: Borrowed Earth by Ahilan Karunaharan and Prayas Theatre.
Image: Julie Zhu.

The Pink Hammer by Michele Amas, Tadpole Productions.
Image: Simon Woodward.

Mirror Mirror by Alison Quigan, Troy Tu'ua and the cast, Mangere Arts Centre.
Image: Tanya Muagututui'a.

Chance to Ignite created by Scotty Cotter, Tuyet Nguyen and Massive Nui Ensemble, Massive Company.
Image: Andi Crown.

Spirit House – A Ghost Story by Carl Bland, Nightsong Productions and Theatre Stampede.
Image: Meg Cumberpatch.

PREVIOUS PAGE: *Kororāreka: The Ballad of Maggie Flynn* by Paolo Rotondo, Red Leap Theatre Company.
Image: John McDermott.

untold histories of Indian immigration to Aotearoa, from a 1920s market gardener to a modern-day student.

But let's talk about the D-word for a sec. We all know that Tāmaki is one of the most diverse cities in the world, and – god bless 'em – our mainstage companies are starting to recognise that too. For Auckland Theatre Company, this was especially clear in their Here & Now Festival, led by theatre-makers Alice Canton (*Dance Like Everybody's Watching*), Niu Wave Collective (*Mouth:Tongue:Teeth*) and Eleanor Bishop and Julia Croft (*Boys*). Their work proves what can happen when you don't underestimate the intelligence of the young actors you work with – or the audience either.

What else? Our city's most recent commercial success has been the Pop-up Globe, who moved from the Greys Ave car park to the Ellerslie Racecourse. Their "historically accurate" all-male casting continues to be criticised and was defended by artistic director, Miles Gregory like this: "Publically criticising artists for the gender balance in their work, to me, is dangerous... It politicises work." This was honestly better than the complete silence from New Zealand Opera, who continued to cast white performers as Chairman Mao, Otello and – of course – the entirety of *The Mikado*.

But for the most part, it's been a year for theatre growing up: ATC moved into their gorgeous new home on the waterfront. The Auckland Arts Festival shifted into an annual rotation (Carla van Zon programmed it for the last time). Silo Theatre turned 20 – and are celebrating with a bumper year of greatest hits and sexy new work (not only *Cellfish* but the work coming through their Working Titles development programme).

With all these plates shifting, Tāmaki's theatre scene – and the city as a whole – feels like it's starting to emerge from its teenage years. It's starting to understand who it is and what it wants, and increasingly it's building for the future: thinking about the infrastructure it needs to nourish itself. More big ideas, more urgent work, more strategic use of resource – it's for a future we can call rich, in every sense of the word.

STILL PIONEERS

Surviving by creating flexible theatre with Indian Ink's Jacob Rajan.

I remember somebody calling me a “pioneer” in an interview once. I guess it’s true. I was the first Indian graduate from Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School. When I formed Indian Ink Theatre Company with Justin Lewis in 1997 we were the first theatre company speaking with an Indian New Zealand voice. *Krishnan’s Dairy*, our first play, shone a rare light on the Indian immigrant experience. We used masks in mainstream theatre. Outside of Nelson, nobody did that.

Of course, there’s a romanticism that goes with that label – taming frontiers and, ironically, killing Indians – but the bulk of pioneering involves trying not to freeze or starve to death.

We are a nation of four million. That’s the size of Melbourne, but spread out across the landmass of the UK. As pioneers we had to trundle our wagon (Toyota station wagon) across the length and breadth of Aotearoa to reach our audience. Our theatre sets have to be designed to squeeze within the back of a trailer. They have to be able to fit 2000 seat lyric theatres or 100 seat black boxes. Enter John Verryt, gruff Dutchman and designer extraordinaire.

The greatest example of the adaptability of John’s design is *Guru of Chai*. We launched

the show in 30 houses, apartments, and community halls across Wellington and Auckland. We’d turn up at your house two hours before opening; clear out your living room furniture, erect the entire set (including dimmable lights) and perform to your friends and family perched on your sofa, coffee table and dining room chairs. It was hard work to pack in and out of a new venue every night and wasn’t without its challenges. Like figuring out how to fit our set into your apartment’s lift or how to stop our lighting rig blowing your fuses.

So why take on this madness? In part, it was a response to the Global Financial Crisis. Money was tight and people weren’t going to the theatre so we decided to take it to them. Necessity is the mother of invention. These house performances were also the birthplace of instances of accidental theatre magic. I remember one such moment when, at the point my character recounts how seven sisters are abandoned in a railway station, I looked up and saw a group of young Indian women dressed in identical saris, peering out from our host’s kitchen. They were the staff of the caterers drawn out by curiosity, unwittingly stepping into the world of the play.



TRYING NOT TO FREEZE OR STARVE TO DEATH

We rode out the GFC and although still committed to touring at home knew our survival depended on extending our reach beyond these shores. If you need your entire set to fit into your suitcases – as we did when we toured *Guru of Chai* to America, Canada and India – John Verryt's your man. He works miracles with sari silk, canvas and string. Of course, the budget is entirely shoestring.

There's a certain creativity that comes into play when you're given such limitations. It necessitates good design, economy with props and imaginative staging. In environments like the Edinburgh Fringe this is essential. With five shows sharing the same venue on the same night, you have to be able to put your set up in twenty minutes and take it down in ten. It didn't phase us, we're Kiwis, it's what our sets were born to do.

When we took *Krishnan's Dairy* to India we had almost the opposite problem. The vast distances between Calcutta, Bangalore and New Delhi and our tight touring schedule made it impossible for our set to travel with us and reach each venue in time. The solution: our tour manager, Cathy Knowsley with the aid of an interpreter, translated John Verryt's original set blueprints to a crew of

Indian carpenters who made three identical sets that greeted us as we arrived at each theatre. The entire exercise was still cheaper than freighting the set from New Zealand.

We're now embarking on a new challenge. A commission for a new work for an American theatre company called South Coast Repertory based in Orange County, California. We're writing them a play called *Welcome to the Murder House*. It's going to be for an entirely American cast and we'll be working with an American set designer. The production values are much bigger. Everything's bigger over there! It's fun to play in a supersized sandpit but there are some cultural differences. For example, they've questioned why we do character doubling. What can I say? Is it an aesthetic or does it come from a lifetime of being thrifty? Maybe a bit of both. What we do know is that South Coast Repertory is the largest producer of new work in America and two of their commissioned shows last year went on to Broadway. We're also pretty sure we're their first international collaboration. Still pioneers after all these years.

ABOVE: *Guru of Chai* by Jacob Rajan and Justin Lewis, Indian Ink Theatre Company. Image: Robert Catto.



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INSTRUCTION MANUAL

Julia Croft's how-to guide for experimental performance.

A guide. A manifesto. A confession.

A love letter.

1. Beginnings are difficult. Look awkwardly across the room. Laugh nervously. Avoid eye contact. This feels like falling in love.
2. Attempt to find the beginning without being poetic or derivative. Find that this is impossible. Begin anyway. With pop music.
3. Costumes. You cannot afford. Perhaps some larger theatre company will take pity and let you raid their closet. Perhaps your mother might do the same. Don't tell them it will end up coated in mayonnaise.
4. You cannot sew. Stop thinking that you will be able to make costumes. They will fall apart. Sometimes mid-show.
5. Set. Items gathered from your house without asking your flatmates will suffice. Or dirt from Myers Park (you are really inspired by Pina Bausch at the moment).
6. Rehearsal space. You also cannot afford. Perhaps a larger theatre company will take pity and let you use space after hours. Rehearsing until 2am is an exploration of a new practice, not a dim economic reality with the realisation that the heating gets turned off at midnight.
7. Luxuries that can be done without: wages, APRA, that live musician you were hoping for, programmes, a publicist, breakfast.
8. Useful sources for successful shows in recent years: something about your grandmother, New Zealand history, nostalgic pop songs. You however are an experimental artist so instead work with nudity, a raw chicken and the entire Nicki Minaj back catalogue. It will be edgy. It will confuse people. This is not a bad thing. Confusing people is a means of disrupting the capitalist culture of frenzy that demands desire be fulfilled at every moment.
9. Talk about your practice loudly in inner city cafes.
10. Lie on a studio floor listening to Taylor Swift. Have a temper tantrum.
11. Have a drunken argument with your flatmate about the structural gender inequality of NZ theatre.
12. Fall in love with someone you have only met twice. Spend hours on their Facebook page. Hours.
13. Decide the direction of the show is all wrong and you need to start again.



Photo credit: Anita Narbey and O Le Tulafale Ltd.

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Capital thinking. Globally minded.



14. Decide the show is actually about the internet. This feels modern and topical.
15. Realise this is too vague and was probably sub-consciously arrived at in order to legitimise hours spent scrolling through photos of ex-boyfriends and their new girlfriends. Stop scrolling. Seriously stop it.
16. Return to original idea.
17. Hold your nerve.
18. Waitressing.
19. Update Facebook status with a quote from Pina Bausch.
20. No one will come. This is a disaster.
21. No one will come. This is a disaster.
22. Start obsessively googling one way flights to Hong Kong.
23. Fight for legitimacy as a performance creator in a writer-dominated theatre ecosystem.
24. Resist capitalism while deciding on ticket prices.
25. \$10 bottle of wine – repeat.
26. What is the point?
27. Find each other in the rehearsal room laughing till you are both crying. Feel satisfied that this is the point.
28. If you run out of ideas – get naked. This makes it art.
29. Experiment with body fluids – this makes it performance art.
30. Read feminist theory and.....
31. Where do ideas come from?
32. Where do ideas come from?
33. Where do ideas come from?
34. Nap.
35. Say sorry. Start calling the phone number three times. Hang up before it starts to ring.
36. Write a poem that you will throw away as soon as it is done.
37. Deeply question the purpose.



38. Get lost.
39. Talk confidently about politics and urgency.
40. Cry quietly in a café bathroom
41. Learn to hold two ideas simultaneously: "This show doesn't really matter in the scheme of things" and "This show is life and death."
42. HOLD.
43. YOUR.
44. NERVE.
45. Dream of what The Civic stage looks like empty, alone at 4am on a Tuesday.
46. Try.
47. Fail.
48. Delight in this failure as a radical political act.
49. Look out at the audience opening night. Fall in love with each one of them.
50. \$10 glasses of wine.
51. Imagine every theatre in the world across all of time in which women stood up and were heard. This is the point.
52. When someone asks about the process, talk about how easeful it was.
53. Forget.
54. Start again.

ABOVE: *Power Ballad* by Julia Croft, Zanetti Productions.
Image: Peter Jennings.



KEEPING GOOD COMPANY

Adam Goodall on what happened to the theatre ensemble in New Zealand.

It was the late 1940s and something had to be done. The plays weren't good enough; the playhouses, not fit for purpose; the actors young amateurs, left to develop their craft on the fly. "If we wait for the best," Prime Minister Peter Fraser said (and when was the last time you heard the Prime Minister weigh in on the state of the country's theatre), "we will not have the good while we are waiting." Someone had to act.

That someone was RJ Kerridge, the brains behind the company the New Zealand Theatre. "Knowing the expressed wishes of the people", Kerridge wrote in a pamphlet, "New Zealand is to have its own permanent professional theatre, dedicated to the entertainment and service of the people."

"I think they did five shows," recalled Mervyn Lusty in Peter Harcourt's *A Dramatic Appearance*, "and the next thing Kerridge announced the whole thing was finished." The New Zealand Theatre was a rank embarrassment, an imported English repertory by all accounts no better than the existing amateur network – a condescending cut-rate effort by a certified blowhard. But the first rumblings of local professionalisation weren't far off.

The Community Arts Service began touring the Auckland provinces in 1947, and Richard

and Edith Campion followed in 1953 with the New Zealand Players company. Returning from England, the Campions aimed, Harcourt says, to "develop a style with an acceptable 'local' flavour; to give opportunity at every level, and to the fullest extent, to New Zealanders who wished to make a career in theatre – particularly playwrights;" and to draw in as many people as possible with low admission prices and constant touring.

The New Zealand Players met with responsive and enthusiastic audiences across the country. "When they first started we suddenly thought, 'By god, this is ours and we're doing it,'" Raymond Hawthorne, who worked with the Players in the late 1950s, remembers.

They also faced obstacles that would prove their undoing. Touring our hostile geography was expensive. Amateur companies and cinemas competed for theatre space and audiences. And then in the late 1950s the desire for a 'national theatre' cooled.

The Players ultimately collapsed in 1960, but the company set off a spark. Touring ensembles and resident companies sprung up through the 1960s and 1970s. For some, there was a concerted effort to professionalise, to lock down spaces and to cement production houses and touring

companies as steady employers. For others, there was a need to push back against the stifling, motherland-centric work of companies like the Players (only four of their productions were by New Zealand writers) with community-focussed work and work from local writers.

There were professional touring companies like Richard Campion, Antony Groser and Roy Hope's short-lived New Zealand Theatre Company; community-focused touring groups like Te Ika a Māui Players, Amamus Theatre Group and the Town and Country Players; and resident companies like Downstage, Gateway, Four Seasons, Fortune, The Court, Mercury and Centrepont were established all, at their heights, paying full-time wages to all actors in their company.

Another company, Theatre Corporate, was founded in Auckland in 1974. Corporate emerged out of a burgeoning community of amateur and developing actors on Karangahape Road, where founding member Raymond Hawthorne held acting classes. "I had so many good people working with me," Hawthorne says, "who were committed to what we were doing. Actors who had been working for years wanted to come and work at Corporate because we were an ensemble and doing extraordinary sorts of work, a wide range of work."

By 1978, Theatre Corporate had a core troupe of 20 actors spread across three companies – a Resident Company, a Theatre in Education company and a Story Theatre company touring primary schools. "Theatre In Education and Story Theatre made good money. Very, very good money," Hawthorne says. "We operated Theatre Corporate off that money [for a long time]."

The late 1970s and early 1980s were a boom time for these professional theatres. As noted in Paul Maunder's *Rebellious Mirrors: Community-Based Theatre in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, funding became "more democratic and less centralised"

under Norman Kirk's Labour, "reflecting a desire for democratic institutions from society in general".

Professional theatres started connecting with each other: "...we met frequently to talk about our growth and establishment," Hawthorne recalls. "The community felt a commitment to maintaining [its workforce]. It was like a growing-up process."

Then, in 1984, the Arts Council held a crisis meeting about the future of theatre. Murray Edmond wrote in *Landfall*: "The first guy to speak was from Treasury. He walked in and very quickly told us the future. Absolutely accurate. We all fell about laughing."

Times got harder. High inflation rates and right-wing reforms to the Arts Council in the 1980s and 1990s increased the pressure. Arts Council funding dropped. In 1976 New Zealand had nine subsidised professional regional theatres; four of those had collapsed by 1986, including Theatre Corporate.

The New Zealand theatre company had to adapt. One solution was jettisoning the resident company model; as in the 1940s, actors were now contractors, flying from gig to gig. New models were introduced such as at Circa where pay was now contingent on box office results.

Others looked to touring as the solution. The New Zealand Actors Company was set up in 1999 by Simon Bennett, Tim Balme, Katie Wolfe and Robyn Malcolm. It was modelled on the Campions' Players and Kenneth Branagh's Renaissance Theatre Company. "We wanted to break down those barriers [that the theatre is an elitist pastime] and make going to a show a bit more like a rock and roll experience than a polite, 'high art' experience," Bennett tells me. "We thought that by doing populist work, on a large scale, utilising actors with high public profiles due to their television work, that would be one way of achieving it."

...AS IN THE 1940S, ACTORS WERE NOW CONTRACTORS



It was also about embracing risk in the process of building work, balancing text-based analysis and improvisation. Bennett emphasises this point – a steady ensemble, paid and working together on a regular basis, trust each other more, and with that trust comes a greater level of risk-taking, and better work.

“We knew that to do work of the scale and quality that we wanted to do we’d need to rehearse for five weeks, we’d need big casts and [there was] no way we could afford to do that if we were just doing a single-centre performance.” NZAC spent 2000 and 2001 touring a wildly successful production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (“I think TV advertising made a big difference”) and a season of Roger Hall’s *A Way of Life*.

NZAC ultimately collapsed following *Leah*, a “challenging, controversial, quite uncompromising” gender-swapped *King Lear* that played in Wellington’s International Arts Festival and Auckland. The Auckland season was cancelled abruptly, halfway through the season, due to falling audience numbers. “We just couldn’t carry a loss the size of that disaster,” Bennett says. “I still feel terribly sad about that till this day because as a model for touring work around this country, it really worked.”

PREVIOUS PAGE: *The Song of Johnny Muscle* by Simon O’Connor, Theatre Corporate, 1979. Image: Courtesy of Auckland Libraries Sir George Grey Special Collections.

ABOVE: *A Way of Life* by Roger Hall, NZ Actors Company, 2001. Image: Courtesy of Simon Bennett.

NEXT PAGE: *Ancient Shrines and Half Truths* by Binge Culture, Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Image: Karin McCracken.

THE ENSEMBLE AS SOMETHING TO ASPIRE TO IS FAR FROM DEAD

"I think what killed us was we tried to run before we could walk. We were doing shows on a huge scale, and we didn't have the financial backstop to be able to sustain a failure... To be successful creatively, you have to be able to fail."

NZAC was the last attempt at building such a large scale touring initiative. Other theatremakers took to building small, agile touring companies. In the early and mid-1990s, companies like Theatre at Large, Inside Out, Trouble and Indian Ink found success as lean companies working from project to project. This model has only become more prevalent.

One current example is Wellington's Binge Culture. Founded in 2008, Binge has taken three productions to the 2017 Edinburgh Fringe.

"The purpose of the company isn't to provide a living for the people who are part of it," Joel Baxendale says. "The purpose is to create a certain kind of work." Fellow founding members Fiona McNamara and Claire O'Loughlin agree. "I don't know if we could make a living for five or six people from Binge, but I think we could have at least one person who makes a living from it," McNamara follows. "We could do that if we did things like school tours and corporate gigs, but do we want to do those things or would we rather do the work that we want to do and then go do other work that we're interested in that can actually pay an hourly wage?"

Even if Binge were in it to make a living from it, they're frank that they don't think the support exists. "It's really hard when you can't afford to pay anyone continuously," O'Loughlin says. "Getting project-to-project funding is great when it comes through and hopefully there's enough to do a good project and be generous and bring people in and make a good show, but then where's the funding to think about the next thing? There's no continuity."

"Theatre – the calibre of the work – has become de-professionalised," Bennett suggests. "I'm talking big, broad generalisations here. I believe that resident company, ensemble, call it what you will, where you have a group of performers who are regularly exercising their art, their craft, their muscle, their imagination, they grow and they can come up with work that exceeds anything where a group of people are brought together for one project..."

It's currently incredibly difficult to build a theatre company that can employ people as an ongoing concern. Part of that's because of the funding environment. "The funding environment is output-focussed," McNamara elaborates. "They don't want to fund back-end office work... which is so essential to



actually running any kind of organisation.” “It’s inefficient,” Baxendale adds, “because if you can’t get funding for a certain project it means a whole bunch of work is wasted. All sorts of things get pushed back. You can’t plan with project funding.”

A lot of the old resident companies drew revenue from different streams, too: educational programmes, lunchtime theatre, late night theatre, training classes and work for children. Many of these things aren’t done anymore. “The companies’ situations aren’t as strong,” Hawthorne says. “Major companies now don’t have enough body in them to have that sort of technique work, and the little ones work themselves to death to achieve what they do achieve but they don’t earn enough money.”

There is more and cheaper competition now from cinema, television, streaming services and other mediums. There’s also more competition from those mediums for actors, writers and other creative professionals, such that committing to a year contract at

a provincial theatre is a harder proposition than ever. That’s not to mention that programming based on predetermined ensembles may be deeply unattractive to theatres because it could have a limiting effect on what work gets programmed, leaving them unable to change their programming to adapt to financial challenges and potentially impact New Zealand writers negatively.

For a company like this to be worth anything it has to be healthy. A company that runs its actors into the ground or collapses after two years is little more valuable to an actor, or an audience member, than that actor gigging in the provinces for that same time. But the idea of the resident company is far from dead. “I believe it’s possible. It just needs more support if it’s going to happen,” Bennett says. “And by support, I mean funding. I mean sponsorship, both corporate and philanthropic. Because the business model exists and the expertise in touring also exists for it to work.”



WORKING THE ROOM

Natasha Hay surveys theatremakers' and theatres' approach to spaces.

From touring community halls and working site-specifically, to making shows that can adapt to both proscenium-arch theatres and studio black-boxes, playwrights and theatremakers today need to respond to very different venues when developing work. But are playwrights considering enough the spaces they are writing for when they front up to the keyboard?

Gary Henderson's plays have had outings in a very diverse range of venues, but what happens to the produced show he says is out of his hands. His most successful play *Skin Tight* has been produced in venues of many different scales. "When I started writing plays I always pictured them being staged at BATS – which they usually were – so that influenced the way I saw them, and possibly the way I wrote them.

"I'm working on a commission for The Court Theatre, and I'm picturing that wide stage, which is also affecting how I envisage the work. It's more like the work is answering the space. You go in there and build a world.

The amount of room you have and the shape of that room influences the physical design of that world."

Creativity can do a lot with very few resources, but happily, theatremakers are thinking beyond the cheapest solution of putting a chair on stage and doing a solo show. Even at one of the birthplaces of such shows, BATS for instance, with its rejuvenated spaces artists continue to push the boundaries of the spaces themselves.

"I'd love playwrights to know what our venue can and can't do," says Palmerston North's Centrepont Theatre director Dan Pengelly. "I've seen the best use of space when I've been in direct conversation with writers on the development of a project. My provocation to writers: where do you want your work produced? If you say to yourself, I want it at the ASB Waterfront Theatre or Centrepont Theatre, then come talk to the people running them and gather the info on the venue, scale and context we are in."



Q Theatre's James Wilson believes writers are reluctant to push the limits of what can be achieved. He thinks more could be done in New Zealand to develop writing for non-traditional spaces, and more producing nationally outside those spaces.

"We have a thriving regional festival scene in New Zealand. Together with PANNZ's new touring agency, Tour-Makers, this means that more work is having the chance to be seen outside the main centres. It is specifically mandated by CNZ to tour NZ theatre of medium-to-large scale – so the ambition and belief is there – it's just that so often the centres the work is going to are traditional 'end-on'-style spaces.

"When you add the restrictions of a traditional venue to the financial challenges of touring a large-scale work, the sheer level of support needed to stage epic productions takes bravery, tenacity and bloody-mindedness."

What do have prominence currently in New Zealand are easy-to-tour shows, with a dedicated bunch of strolling players making work that can shapeshift into myriad venues up and down the country. Helen Moulder has, with Sue Rider, been creating and performing works that adapt to any space for almost 20 years – living rooms, meeting rooms, bowling clubs, retirement villages, art galleries...

...KNOW WHAT OUR VENUE CAN AND CAN'T DO

ABOVE: *Black Confetti* by Eli Kent, Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School. Image: Philip Merry.

AUCKLAND THEATRE COMPANY

Philippa Campbell, ATC's literary manager, hopes the spanking new ASB Waterfront Theatre will be a positive influence on New Zealand playwriting. Figuring this out is a process of discovery, she says, in which the theatre management and the creative community will need to be agile and open-minded.

"What kind of solo show would resonate in the space? We don't yet know. How intimate can the play be and still connect with the audience? We're starting to find out. But it's impossible to be prescriptive about how writers and theatremakers might respond to questions of scale which arise when your performance home seats over 600 people.

"The depth of examination and intensity of the ideas at the heart of a play, the complexity of the characters and their relationships, the skill of the storytelling, the theatricality and how these things come together and relate to the world outside of the theatre, the world of the audience – all contribute to how a play might work in a moderately large space such as the ASB Waterfront Theatre."

Some playwrights have expressed confusion to Campbell about what ATC wants, but there isn't, she says, a formula. "Until a play is performed it exists in a kind of psychic space which is what playwrights open up as a new play is developed...

"On an artistic level, I always get excited by stage directions like the one in Briar Grace-Smith's *Paniora!* where a large bull arrives in the middle of a scene. In the production dancers became the bull, which came out of a really fruitful collaboration with Okareka Dance Company."



A TOURING CULTURE THAT
DICTATES PERFORMANCE
TRENDS...

"When I'm touring," says Helen, "every night the placement of the audience is different, from the intimacy of 20 people in a living-room to 200 people in a country hall. The challenge is to hold on to the integrity of the performance while adjusting the size of the presentation. The most recent tour of *Gloria's Handbag* played in the Laboratory, a restaurant in Lincoln with a stage of about 2.5m x 2m, and in the Whanganui Opera House, where our set could expand to 5m x 3.5m."

When a work is conceived to be presented outside of theatres, then it can open up possibilities for surprising things to happen. Dunedin boasts a strong culture of such work, possibly due to its great building stock. A recent example is *Alive in Berlin* facilitated by Simon O'Connor. O'Connor says the work was conceived as an installation piece with spoken word and he imagined it being mounted in an art-gallery space with the audience wandering around freely.

"When Tamsin Cooper of [creative space broker] Urban Dream Brokerage showed us through the Undermarket space, it opened up possibilities



and raised challenges. The space resembles an underground car park. It's a vast basement with a low ceiling and two rows of pillars. Whichever way you faced, your view was interrupted by a pillar. That made conventional staging impractical, which was a great thing. *Berlin* is mostly about uncertainty and estrangement and fragmentation of relationships and sense of place, of sense of self."

They set up seating to face in random directions and encouraged people to change their seats whenever they felt like viewing the piece from a different perspective. "We went with what the space seemed to invite us to do. The important thing was the architecture and the feel of the space contributed to the ideas in the piece."

Site-specific work gives theatremakers the opportunity to respond to the function and history of a space. It's something Dunedin's Wow! Productions has done since 1996, notably with their latest extravaganza *Farley's Arcade: The Wildest Place in Town*, co-directed by Lisa Warrington and Richard Huber with design by Martyn Roberts.

BATS THEATRE

"The difference between old and new BATS is we now have three spaces," says Heather O'Carroll, BATS Programme Manager.

Interestingly, the timing of the move coincided with changes in health and safety legislation. "There's no longer a cowboy attitude where you can do whatever you want and no matter the consequences. Now things take more time and cost more money or require more expertise that younger co-ops don't necessarily have."

"It's not to say we don't get high-level designs," says Nick Zwart, the Technical and Facilities Manager, "it's just harder to achieve. So it's always exciting when co-ops do have money and can be ambitious with their design. A particular aspect of this is every year we have the STAB Commission, which is fully funded from CNZ. STAB has a deep scope to fully implement design into the process." A lot of shows that premiere at BATS use the architecture, Zwart says.

Generally, more thought is going into the use of the space, O'Carroll believes, citing touring as a motivator. That also goes for works that didn't premiere at BATS.

"We recently staged *The Basement Tapes*. The original production was during the NZ Fringe Festival in a basement underneath an apartment block and it won the Melbourne Fringe Tour Ready award.

"I loved the show and offered a return season at BATS. They did an incredible design and reconfigured our downstairs space, which is something not everybody does, and created a very intimate basement-like space.

"Promenade opera, *Dido and Aeneas*, not only used The Propeller Stage and The Heyday Dome, but the bar and stairwell too. That was a show they had done at The Basement in Auckland ..."



ALLOW THE ROOM TO INFLUENCE THE PROCESS

PREVIOUS PAGE: *Matatihi: Maia's Journey of Bravery* by Rutene Spooner and Holly Chappell, The Court Theatre. Image: Nick King.

ABOVE: Rehearsal of *Footprints/Tapuwaē*, Free Theatre with Te Pao a Tahu and Te Ahikōmau a Hamoterangi. Image: Stuart Lloyd-Harris.

“The challenge was how to create a piece of living history,” says Roberts, explaining that the idea came from producer Gareth McMillan, who wanted a show about Dunedin’s first shopping mall. “Gareth had a vision to recreate the arcade on or near the site where it once sat. Sadly, it is very redeveloped so Wow! looked around and found the Athenaeum building in the Octagon. We ended up creating a promenade piece through this vast site and the centrepiece was Gareth’s vision of a working arcade. We had hawkers, shops, street people, shoppers and vagabonds all working the audience.”

The work responded entirely to the site, says Warrington. “The Athenaeum houses a rather ramshackle little theatre and this gave us a highly suitable venue for the first part of the Farley’s experience, which was a parody of an original melodrama, set in 1865.

“The use of the whole of the Athenaeum spaces, which include some great nooks and crannies, is not something that audiences can experience that frequently.”

Attempts to do something similar with the Old Dunedin Prison are ongoing and Wow! have their eye on other sites. “The tricky thing,” says Roberts, “is that as this stock becomes upgraded to meet building standards [following the quakes] it becomes out of reach for theatre works.”

Also, unconventional spaces are hard to work in, says Roberts. They cost more as they will require liability insurance and



bringing in all the design elements can be costly. “Having said that, some owners are more than happy to make things work.”

In Christchurch the issue is more one of creating spaces, about which Gap Filler’s Coralie Winn knows only too well. “Venues have gone through ebbs and flows in the wake of the quakes and in the immediate aftermath there were no spaces and people were more open to using whatever they could find.” There is a residue of the post-quake period, she believes. “Performers are taking over spaces that are not traditionally theatre spaces, like the Free Theatre with *The Gym* in the Arts Centre.”

Before *The Gym*, Free Theatre devised and presented a work based on Heinrich von Kleist’s *The Earthquake in Chile* in and around St Mary’s Church in Addington. “We used a church as a church,” says Winn, who is also part of the Theatre. “[We] invited the congregation, the community as well as regular theatre-goers to come together in an experience that drew inspiration from the extraordinary experience of communities after the earthquakes.”

Q THEATRE

James Wilson, Q Theatre’s chief executive, is a strong believer that writers make work for the spaces they know. “In the six years we’ve been open, only one writer has been in touch with me to ask if they could come and ‘play’ in the space to cook up ideas. The writer in question literally just wanted to sit in the space and write, to allow the room to influence the process of drafting and wrangling ideas. I’d love to see this happen more often.”

The funding landscape in New Zealand means it is really only the festivals and the major investment-funded companies that have the ability to commission new work for venues of scale, he says. “We’ve only been resourced to a level where we can support our [developing producers] programme in the 120-seater Loft space... It is our intention to see this programme grow so that practitioners are supported to take on the larger Rangatira space.”

Wilson knows there is no shortage of emerging writers who have ideas of scale to fill that space. “I’ve been struck recently by the imagery and poetry in the writing of people like Ben Anderson, Eli Kent, Chye-Ling Huang, Mei-Lin Hansen, Jess Sayer, Sam Brooks – all writers who are genuinely interested in the possibilities of breaking the black-box, fourth-wall-loving restrictions of so many plays.”

Rangatira is an epic space that suits a powerful discussion of ideas of scale, he says. “The room has an architectural presence – you can see all of the mechanics, the lighting grid, the workings of the space. Productions that celebrate this tend to be more successful than traditional end-on, proscenium-arch theatre shows that close the space down and try to make it what it is not.”

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Their new home is just right for their experimental vision, but “to gain more funding, we were told by the council strategic arts advisor to rethink our design so that we could fit more seats into our space. This is not to say we don’t want lots of audiences, but the value of art beyond the commercial is too easily dismissed.

“I also think it’s a sign that performance culture in New Zealand has been affected detrimentally by the emergence of a touring culture that dictates performance trends – works are made for touring that restrict design elements and place an even greater onus on an already word-laden literary theatre culture.”

Leo Gene Peters, who devises work with *A Slightly Isolated Dog* in Wellington, acknowledges the key is to adapt to theatre spaces, despite their challenges. “I think there is a huge thing about adapting the work to go to spaces that are not purpose-built. The difficult thing that you lose is some element of control. Like if you are in a weird warehouse with a bunch of good windows, the first impulse is to black out all the windows so you make it as much like a theatre space as possible so you can control the aesthetics.

“I like to create work that speaks to the space. I just made *Black Confetti* at Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School. That was working in the SEED Space, which is a really grungy white room in a basement. It works really well with the piece because the way Eli [Kent] and I were reworking *Confetti* was following this group of young people as they go to parties and then this weird hipster underworld in Wellington.

“We put chairs randomly throughout, but there was no stage. It really brought the work alive as it made the audience an intricate part of it.”

A lot of Gene Peters’ works were initially created so they could potentially play in bars. “In Wellington, there are a lot of foodie hipsters running really great bars and restaurants. The next level for theatre is a found space like that, where you could work in collaboration with people who are experts at bringing in people. That seems like the real next step.”

JAN BOLWELL

“All my work is designed to tour,” says playwright, choreographer and performer Jan Bolwell, who has created many such works, “so my first conversation with a set-and-lighting designer is whatever they create must be able to fit flexible spaces. I love the challenge of touring and seeing the work set in different spaces.”

The space does have a significant impact on the work. “When we toured *Double Portrait* about Frances Hodgkins, we often played it in art galleries. Being surrounded by paintings – sometimes Hodgkins’ work, sometimes not – and art objects gave a certain frisson to the play and the play was then presented as set within a set, so to speak.

“Touring *Here’s Hilda*, about my grandmother, I played in small country halls that had been so much part of the rural life of my grandmother, and it felt as if I had brought the play into the heart of my grandmother’s life as a South Island farming woman.

“Similarly, when I played *Bill Massey’s Tourists* about my grandfather’s WWI experiences at the Auckland Regimental Headquarters in front of uniformed ex-NZ Army soldiers, it was an extraordinarily moving experience for us all, even though it was presented in a very ordinary lecture room.”

Bolwell has toured with Arts on Tour New Zealand – “who do everything” – as well as on her own and loves the challenges of each new venue. “You can discover new things about the work when you play in each venue and have to adapt space, timing and projection.

“I write mainly solo works or three or four-hander plays. I find it a very good artistic challenge to travel with a simple set and six lights and hopefully still be able to transport an audience.”



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— DIALOGUE WITH THE SPACE AND ITS BOUNDARIES

SAM TRUBRIDGE

Sam Trubridge, is a director, theatremaker and artistic director of The Performance Arcade, a successful annual festival of the live arts in shipping containers on the Wellington waterfront. He stresses the importance of having a dialogue with space and architecture for his theatre practice.

“I love rewriting each work for its new context: considering what the audience are concerned about, as much as how the walls, floors, ceiling, and various spaces within a venue might also emphasise a visceral relationship between the show and its present moment in time. I spend a lot of time studying the venues that my works will be presented in – looking for spatially effective ways of arranging the audience and the various components of the show within that architecture.”

Each new space with its unique history and culture offers opportunities to rethink a show for Trubridge. When he did *Sleep/Wake* at La MaMa’s Ellen Stewart Theatre in New York in 2015, the work was reshaped from its earlier presentations in Wellington Print Factory, an industrial space (2008) and Auckland’s Town Hall (2009).

“The Ellen Stewart was the precise kind of theatre that *Sleep/Wake* was designed for, with a really deep stage that most shows would curtain off. There was a fantastic opportunity for a telescoping experience, an unfolding of the space that kept getting deeper and deeper throughout the show until the audience could see past the dancers on stage, all the way into the dressing rooms at the back...”

“These kinds of effects and moments are really profound to me, where the work is in dialogue with the space and its boundaries.”

Trubridge feels there is a great conservatism with regards to venue and site-use these days.

“If you look at images of productions made in warehouse spaces, old buildings, quarries, and all sorts of great sites in the past, you realise how little of this happens these days. New health and safety laws make property owners, companies and artists much too risk-averse.”

ABOVE: *Sleep/Wake* by Sam Trubridge, The Playground NZ, 2008. Image: Sam Trubridge.



WELLINGTON

BY SAM PHILLIPS

In *The Rime of the Modern Mariner*, the 2016 BATS STAB Commission, a boat is lost adrift, doomed to float wherever the sea takes it. Similarly in Wellington there's a feeling that the wind has gone out of our sails. In a post-Downstage world where drama school grads jump ship to Auckland and our mid-career practitioners drift between BATS and Circa, how do we get out of the doldrums? The past few roundups have acknowledged tectonic shifts in our city's arts ecology, so I want to acknowledge who we look to as captains, and where the wind is blowing.

There is incredible work being created in our drama school. Last year's devised *Caucus*, *Caucus*, *Harvest*, *Dawn* at Toi Whakaari was a theatrical spectacle, offering a scale otherwise only seen in our international festivals. Up the hill, Victoria University creates passionate young theatremakers who flood the city with new voices and works (*Maggot* at Your FAV – Fringe at Victoria – a great example). The new Whitireia Te Auaha Campus will bring new practitioners right into Cuba Street.

BATS and Circa represent sustainable professional theatre in Wellington, but both their programmes are jam-packed. BATS (led by Heather O'Carroll and Waren Thomas) are working hard to fill the gap left by Downstage. Comedy Festival showed that BATS at max capacity is an awesome place to be, packed with new audiences and an exciting mix of the local (*PSA*), national (*Escape from Gloriavale*) and international (*Tessa Waters Over Promises*). Stella Reid's award-winning production of *Orphans*, Miria George's *The Vultures* and Fran Olds' and Luke

Hanna's *The Fence* were great. They all deserve larger stages and longer seasons.

Circa's 2016/17 programme once again featured a large number of risk-share seasons. Worth noting were the 14 actors in *Three Days in the Country*, and the possessed puppetry of *Hand to God*, *Last Legs* and the revival of *Weed*." Two BATS transfers, *White Man Behind a Desk* and *The First Time* were welcome additions, and the WTF! Women's Theatre Festival was Circa at its most passionate.

The Hannah Playhouse is now a venue for hire, hosting Silo Theatre's genius *Hudson and Halls Live!* and Indian Ink's *The Elephant Thief*.

Taki Rua make great work. *Tiki Taane Mahuta* sold out the Opera House and *Hinepau*, a co-production with Capital E, has toured almost every theatre in the country and is now reaching schools in te reo. Te Haukāinga, the new space bringing together Taki Rua, Tawata, The Conch, and five other Indigenous companies has become a rehearsal venue and community hub.

There are gems in found spaces across the city. Vogelmorn Bowling Club with the help of viking warriors/theatremakers Barbarian Productions host rehearsals, performances and the Spring Uprising festival. Other spaces like Wellington Museum (*It's a Trial*), FLUX Space (*The Maids*, *Hinepau*), 19 Tory Street (*Potato Stamp Megalomaniac*) and Ivy Bar (*Paying For It*) are fertile ground for fresh exciting work. Urban Dream Brokerage continues to be excellent to Wellington, giving us the venue for Stella Reid's *The Basement Tapes* directed by Jane Yonge and James Nokise's *Fouvale Imperium*.



THERE ARE CHANGES IN THE WIND

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

LEFT: *Fallen Angels* by Emily Duncan, Young and Hungry, BATS. Image: Stephen A'Court.

Portrait of an Artist Mongrel: The Writings of Rowley Habib 1933-2016, Hapai Productions, Kia Mau Festival. Image: Kahu Kutia.

Central by Dave Armstrong, Circa Theatre. Image: Paul McLaughlin.

Caucus, Caucus, Harvest, Dawn by Aaron Cortesi, Christian Penny, Jonathan Price, Patrick Carroll and the cast, Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School. Image: Philip Merry.

Olive Copperbottom by Charles Dickens and Penny Ashton, Circa Theatre. Image: Philip Merry.

No Post on Sunday by Everybody Cool Lives Here, Circa Theatre. Image: Philip Merry.

The Rime of the Modern Mariner by Nick Hayes adapted by The Playground Collective, BATS STAB 2016. Image: Paul McLaughlin.

PREVIOUS PAGE: *A Doll's House* by Emily Perkins adapted from Ibsen's original, Circa Theatre. Image: Paul McLaughlin.

Theatre companies are experimenting with double bills, mini festivals, season launches. Capital E's National Arts Festival brings brilliant work for young people to Wellington and their homegrown *An Awfully Big Adventure* is still the best show for young people. Kia Mau Festival is developing a wealth of new Māori and Pasifika theatre. Making Friends Collective (*Stand Up Love, Wine Lips*), Lightshade Creative (Caryl Churchill double bill) and Red Scare Theatre (*Yellow Face*) are testing different ways of programming work.

Yet we all know practitioners are struggling, juggling part or full-time work. Entire drama school classes are moving to Auckland. Post Downstage's demise, Wellington practitioners are deeply feeling the loss of an artist-curated theatre.

There are changes in the wind. For one, we've shifted the way we acknowledge success: the Wellington Theatre Awards are now judged by a 10-strong cross section of the industry acknowledging work against the best of the country. This forces us to shake off parochial thinking, embrace an open vision for Wellington stages, and encourages practitioners to be responsive and agile in a shifting arts market.

Wellington practitioners are having their work seen widely. Both *Don Juan* (which cleaned up at the 2016 Auckland Theatre Awards) and *My Best Dead Friend* were at Q Theatre. Binge Culture Collective, Trick of the Light, Nokise, Eleanor Bishop and others are braving Edinburgh with their work.

When I need to get the wind back in my sails who do I look to? Nokise's call to action at the Wellington Theatre Awards – "I am more important than Shakespeare" – challenging us to look to our people, our stories, our world. Trick of the Light Theatre and A Slightly Isolated Dog, who make their work within funding and touring slipstreams. Members on the Circa Council who are advocating for positive change in the building. To Stella Reid, Miria George, and Jo Randerson. Adam Goodall and *Pantograph Punch* who critique our work and connect it to work from around the country. Rob Mokaraka's aroha, and Peter Hudson's and David Halls' love.

We can weather this storm, the winds will pick up soon.

Why we Wrote the Play we Wrote

ERINA DANIELS

on Party with the Aunties

I grew up in a small country town with a main street, a hall, a primary school, a Reid Farmers, a pub (with large car park out front), rugby clubrooms, a freight haulage depot, a post office and Plunket Rooms (since closed), a community centre (which we fundraised for), and a war memorial. And a bridge. And some houses. Surrounded by sheep farms.

My family all worked in the shearing sheds. My uncles shored sheep, my aunties ran the wool and shed set-up, all us cussies did time rouseying, pressing, penning up or shearing. Some of us still do. We worked hard and played hard.

At our parties, my uncles would be stomping their wool-socked feet, keeping rhythm as they played guitars. And my aunties would sing song after song – they knew all the words.

This is the community to whom the show *Party with the Aunties* is dedicated.

Party with the Aunties held its premiere season in a garage on Wellington Road, Paekakariki in April 2011. I was completing a Master of Theatre Arts in Directing, taught jointly by Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School and the theatre programme of Victoria University of Wellington, and this was my major directing project.

I wanted the show to remind me of a way

of being. A way that involves smarty-pants humour, being considerate and being pragmatic – these are some of the strengths of my family. I needed to remind myself of them, of us, of our way in the world. I sought to make a show which would manifest within its audiences the feeling of ‘enjoy’.

At the beginning of our working together in February 2011, I presented the collaborators with as much as I knew about the show, the world of it and its characters. My job was to define the situations, characters, and songs; and link the scenes. The actor/devisors would offer their skills as improvisers. Often our designer would too.

I asked each collaborator what in their craft they would like to work on. My limited budget meant I couldn't afford to pay their monetary worth but I valued their time in space and focus with me, and hoped this question would benefit us both. Their answers would further define the parameters through which *Party with The Aunties* would take shape.

As we shared stories of parties and our people, we uncovered characters that were consistently enjoyable to play. We tested these characters alongside others, holding them within the phases of a party.

We noted the dialogue that was consistently memorable and repeatable. Each section of the script began to take shape as we formalised what each character wanted in a scene; and as we consolidated our plot markers (major cue points).

It was important for me to make this a piece of theatre to be enjoyed – by audiences, and by the makers themselves. The work is constructed to tour. We had to enjoy each other's company.

Party with the Aunties is designed to fit into any venue where a 50th birthday celebration would be held. We roll with whatever code of conduct the venue has. Each new setting offers us the world in which the characters meet. Part of our re-shaping of the script for each venue involves welcoming the venue's possibilities within the logic of the character interactions.

We have presented in small towns like Paeroa and Whareama as well as major centres like Auckland and Christchurch. We've played in pubs and cafes, RSAs, Workingmen's Clubs, Festival Clubs, and been honoured to play at Patea Maori Club. We've been proudly associated with the good work of Te Whariki Manawahine o Hauraki Women's Refuge, been graciously hosted by small theatres, and supported by bigger regional arts festivals. We've toured community halls and community centres; rugby and soccer clubrooms. We've been privileged to kick-start our mates 40th in Newbury, and to represent internationally at the Festival of Pacific Arts in Guahan.

With each performance, I hoped to create a space in which to remind ourselves of the songs and people in our life who remind us to enjoy. Feedback is consistent, even from our Guahan audiences: "that happens at our parties" and "I know these people – that's my uncle... my aunty... my cousin..." Sharing also begins to happen: "what about this song... and what about that one at the party who... there was this one party when..."



WE HAD TO ENJOY EACH OTHER

Party with the Aunties was made specifically for people who don't go to theatre. My beautiful aunties. I especially look forward to being an audience of *that* community viewing.

I am grateful that a remarkable team of talented performers and crew said 'yes' to collaborating with me on this project. Their sass, smarts, heart, belief, cunning, delight, kindness, patience, and defiant, sometimes sharp edges helped build this robust and durable show. Thanks always to Jess Sanderson (design), Maria Deere (production mentor), Julia Truscott (publicity, marketing and producer), Rachel Callinan (production assistant and stage management), Cian-Elyse White, Jamie McCaskill and Matariki Whatarau (actors, devisors, story collaborators), Maia Truscott (special reserve), and James Kearney, Taungaroa Emile, Christian Penny, Kura Forrester, Miriama McDowell, Awhina-Rose Henare-Ashby, Cameron Clayton, Karlos Drinkwater and Nick Dunbar.

ABOVE: *Party with the Aunties* by Erina Daniels and the cast, Kokomai Festival 2013. Image: Philip Merry.

WHANGANUI TO WIESBADEN

Anthony McCarten in conversation with Christopher Balme.

Anthony McCarten is, together with Roger Hall, the most successful New Zealand playwright. *Ladies' Night*, co-authored with Stephen Sinclair has been running more or less continuously since 1987. Translated into 16 languages, somewhere as you read this a production of the play will be on somewhere.

More recently McCarten has gained international recognition as a screenwriter. *The Theory of Everything* for which he wrote the screenplay and co-produced was nominated for five Oscars, winning best actor for Eddie Redmayne. His film *Darkest Hour* about Churchill in 1940, starring Gary Oldman has recently been released.

McCarten continues to write for the stage. In the past few years' productions of his adapted novels *Funny Girl* and a musical version of *Death of a Superhero* have had successful productions at different theatres, most notably the Landestheater Salzburg and the State Theatre Wiesbaden.

McCarten's presence on the German stage is unique amongst New Zealand playwrights. New Zealander Christopher Balme, who holds the chair in Theatre studies at the University of Munich, discussed with McCarten his work in Germany and the challenges of writing for different media.

CB: I guess you must be preparing for a celebration?

AM: I suppose you mean *Ladies Night*?

CB: Yes. It was first performed 30 years ago and has been running somewhere ever since. I can think of very few plays in any language which have had such a continual presence on the stage in so many different languages.

AM: I think the main reason is that Stephen (Sinclair) and I are very flexible in terms of allowing the play to be adapted to local conditions. It needs to be translated very freely, including the choice of music. It also works in all sorts of theatres: from 2000 seaters to intimate stages seating 100.



A BUSINESS THAT IS ALL ABOUT BRANDS

CB: Has success as a novelist in Germany had an influence on acceptance as a playwright?

AM: My publisher worked my arse off on the road. These were reading tours of 35 cities in 35 days. They were big cities and tiny towns. I was in literature festivals with an audience of 1000, and then I was in a wheelchair factory in 'Bischofsnickelsheim' with five people. That built an audience. I am led to believe that my name has quite high recognition value in Germany, so people know it; they have seen it in bookstores.

Germans love literature. The fact that on a Friday night they will go to listen to a novelist reading from his book in large numbers is almost unique. In London, you can't get your best friend to come to a reading, even if they live next door to the venue and you offer to pay them, but Germany places a high cultural premium on seeing a novelist read their work. So with *Ladies' Night* still running and six novels published with a good German publisher and flirting with the bestseller

lists you get known and that is way the entertainment industry works.

CB: Have you had much direct experience working with German-speaking theatres? And what is the potential and difficulties working with these lavishly financed theatres?

AM: I have worked with a couple. I worked with a Viennese musical company, the VBW (Vereinigte Bühnen Wien). We were working on a musical that didn't come to pass, based on an adaptation of a play by Arthur Schnitzler. They had an operating budget of around €80 million a year. They had two houses to run with six or seven shows. The resources they had were just astonishing. Contrasting with that I have been working with the Landestheater in Salzburg on straight plays. My experience here is that they have a very different model. They don't expect the author to change anything;

ABOVE: *Ladies Night* by Stephen Sinclair and Anthony McCarten, adapted by Gunnar Dressler, Salzburger Landestheater, Austria. Image: Anna-Maria Löffelberger.

they don't really have a workshop culture. You are invited to come to a reading of your play and when I suggested some changes as a result they were astonished. They tend to place the author on a pedestal; and the author sort of expects a pedestal when they arrive. Where is my pedestal? This is the question the German author must presumably ask. You stand on that and watch them do their work. They are almost overly referential. I wanted to get down in the trenches and do several drafts, but they said no that is the American system. But it is the only way I know to get anything done. People were very surprised and delighted by this and I was treated as a revolutionary for wanting these things. You write the play and they perform it, they are a little unnerved if you suggest you might want to change it. I don't think it is unique to Salzburg, it is the German way.

CB: You are right. We don't have the rite of passage of the workshop model here: this seems very specific to the English-speaking world. To what extent does your third life as a script writer for film cross-pollinate your stage work?

AB: After all the attention I got from *The Theory of Everything* I began to concentrate on my film writing and taking the opportunities that arose from that. But I have sort of pivoted in the last six months and have written two new plays. I have a London West End producer interested in a joint West End-Broadway project. I think that level of ambition on the part of the producer is a result of the film work. Because that offers a marketing angle that previously did not exist. I think the fruits of the goodwill that have come out of *Theory of Everything* won't be felt until one of these plays gets its premiere. Then I am sure that part of the publicity will be about the brand – and increasingly this is a business that is all about brands. And name recognition, and if it is a brand it is linked to quality in people's perceptions and then it makes life easier for financiers and investors and even the public are much more trusting. So it snowballs for you.

CB: It struck me that this idea of the brand seems to be almost a thread through your recent work such as *Theory of Everything* and *Darkest Hour*. Churchill is of course a brand. It seems to be the essential ingredient for entering the more commercially oriented theatre, so it is very hard to sell a story, however interesting it might be, about someone very few people have heard of.

AM: I am doing a number of portraits, such as Freddie Mercury, Churchill, Pope Francis, Catherine the Great, Angelina Jolie, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, and I am loving it because of my love of history. Trying to humanise these iconic figures feels like a real challenge and immense privilege. Provided you have an interesting angle those stories are undoubtedly easier to sell.

CB: Having just spent a couple of months in London I was struck by how well attended some London theatre is, and I don't just mean the West End musicals. For example, the whole four-week run of Simon McBurney's new work at the Royal Court was totally booked out.

AM: If you can cast well a year out you can sell out the entire season in a day. Benedict Cumberbatch's *Hamlet* for example. I think that the entire three-month season was sold in one and half hours. If you want to buy tickets for some things, it is like being on eBay.

CB: Has your visibility as a screenwriter helped you gain contact with any of the major London theatres?

AM: There are two plays I have just completed which are going out for table readings which have already attracted established West End investors. The aim is to groom them both for potential West End and Broadway runs – but much, much, much will depend upon casting and a hell of a lot of moving pieces coming together. So these will be in another order compared to anything theatrically I have done before. It's exciting but talk to me in two years and I'll tell you whether it all worked out.

IS THERE A PLAYWRIGHT IN THE HOUSE?

Stuart Hoar writes on playwright residencies.

In 1988 I took up a position as Playwright in Residence at Auckland's Mercury Theatre and was shown to my office, by Raymond Hawthorne's PA Pam Wright. Thank you Pam, I felt so honoured. Later that day I attended the first day's read-through of *Twelfth Night*, a few days later attended a rehearsal of Athol Fugard's play *Blood Knot* and then, a few days later, saw *The Rivers of China* by NZ-born playwright Alma De Groen upstairs in the Mercury studio theatre (The Gods as it was called). Playwright-in-Residence meant I was automatically comped in to see all productions at the theatre.

And so began my informal but crucial education as a playwright.

The Arts Council of New Zealand, as it was known at that time, ran a series of residencies for playwrights to work at a theatre and observe how they operated. From memory I was paid \$10,000 dollars for a six-month term, but when that finished Raymond Hawthorne generously told me I

was welcome to hang around for the rest of the year if I wished. I did wish and shared the stage managers' office with Keith Foote, Teresa Sokolich and Sarah Milne (for their kindness and forbearance I am eternally grateful). In fact I managed to hang around for another year or so.

Mercury Theatre was my first and only residency specifically as a playwright, and what a great experience it was. I sat in on rehearsals and watched directors, actors, stage designers, costume designers, lighting designers, theatre managers, marketing people, prop makers, conductors, arrangers and stage painters in action.

Many are still in the business almost thirty years later, and I think one of the reasons I still consider myself to be a playwright is thanks to this formative time as part of a working theatre.

It perhaps spoilt me a little. I subsequently assumed theatres to have a basic



infrastructure attached to them, if not a company of actors. Perhaps I'm a little slow in catching up with the philosophy that demands theatres should be lean, mean machines that contract out so much. I still have in my possession a beautiful dead rabbit made with loving care and wonderful skill by the Mercury props department for my first stage play *Squatter*. I had simply written that a character comes on with a dead rabbit on a stick – and props department, with no bother or fuss, made a perfect dead rabbit. And so I was spoiled.

I learnt so much from seeing all these people in action. Directors and actors working day after day on a script, creating performances, making breakthroughs, being confused, going down wrong tracks, having flashes of illumination, and arguing and laughing together (not always on the same day). This was then repeated when designers, builders, musicians, marketing people etc. got in on the act. And because they weren't working on a script I had written, I could watch as a totally relaxed observer. I was learning both from them and from the playwright how a play can be brought to life, and in the process

where things can go wrong and where they can go right.

While it's very important for a playwright to be part of the production of his or her own play there's also great deal of pressure. It can get in the way of the learning process I describe above. Ideally a residency should be over a much longer period than observing and being part of just one production, and while that period of time (six months minimum I think) may involve one of the playwright's works it shouldn't start or finish with that experience.

And ideally the theatre should have a working bar. I look back with something of an involuntary shudder at what I now remember as my drinking years (the days of sloshing back quadruple whiskies with Robert Johnson in the upstairs bar have taken on a misty and mythic dream-like quality in my memory). As well as watching and working with theatre people it's vitally important, and incredibly enjoyable, for any resident playwright to socialise with them.

In 1990 I moved to Auckland University to become writer in residence. Subsequently I have had writing residencies in Dunedin, Christchurch and Menton, France. All were excellent experiences. I was paid handsomely to be writer for each and I was welcomed warmly at the English departments of Auckland, Otago and Canterbury Universities and made many great friendships. The Menton residency was also a totally brilliant experience. One other residency I also had was at St Andrews College in Christchurch for two months – highly enjoyable and productive. I wrote a great deal while at each residency.

However, none had any official connection with a theatre, and while I did build up good relationships with the Fortune, Allen Hall and Court Theatres, it was a completely different experience to being based in a theatre; being part of its daily working life.

I'm not sure when official theatre residencies ended but apart from Auckland Theatre

I STILL HAVE IN MY POSSESSION A BEAUTIFUL DEAD RABBIT



Company granting Eli Kent their inaugural Patrons' Fellowship – a well-paid term of residence at the theatre for six months in 2015 (a terrific initiative to be much applauded but one that so far hasn't been repeated) and Arthur Meek being granted a three-month residency with a Scottish theatre, also in 2015 (thanks to a Playmarket, CNZ and Playwrights' Studio, Scotland initiative) residencies have become so rare as to be seriously endangered.

Playmarket offers very useful opportunities specifically for playwrights with the Robert Lord Cottage residency and their week long Playwrights' Retreat, held every two years, but these are not linked to any particular theatre.

I think there is a simple and cost free solution to re-instigating playwrights' residencies in theatres. There are a number of existing long-term writing residencies such as Auckland's Michael King Fellowship, Wellington's Victoria University Writers' Fellow and Randell Cottage residency, Christchurch's Ursula Bethell Residency, Burns Fellowship in Dunedin and Visiting Artist Scheme in Palmerston North run by Massey University. Many playwrights and/or theatremakers have had these residencies.

Victor Rodger is the present writer in residence at Victoria University.

My suggestion is that Playmarket set up various MOUs with interested theatres to allow for the possibility that any playwright awarded one of these fellowships, if interested, be a playwright/theatremaker in residence as well as based in their various residencies. At the very least they could be welcomed officially and introduced to all who work at the theatre, welcomed as an observer at rehearsals, and offered comps to shows produced during their time.

It needn't be an onerous responsibility on either side but rather an opportunity, if desired, for playwrights/theatremakers and theatres to get to know each other better and learn a little about each other's working processes.

Too often the divide between theatres and theatre writers and makers is bigger than it need be in New Zealand – just because we work (and by implication socialise) more separately than we need to or should.

IMAGE ON PREVIOUS PAGE AND ABOVE:
Squatter by Stuart Hoar, Mercury Theatre, 1987.
Images: Michael Tubberty.

Why we Wrote the Play we Wrote

DAMON ANDREWS, NIGEL COLLINS & TOBY LEACH

on Wheeler's Luck

We wrote *Wheeler's Luck* because we wanted to make our own show. We wanted to make it our way. We had no idea what it would turn into.

We'd meet up in each other's kitchens. The early conversations were about our experiences growing up in small town New Zealand and the people who live there. It was fun. We remembered the same sort of people, mostly – the librarian, the crooked mayor, the nosy postie. The pub-owning Ramsay family was inspired by people who lived on Toby's street in Warkworth – the dad with all the sons. Toby used to go down to the local river and get eels and put them in their letterbox to fuck them off. He'd borrow his mum's carving fork and stab them in the river.

Small town New Zealand turned out to be a rich vein. As the story started emerging, we suddenly found we had a cast of thousands. The heart of the piece came from these characters. Then we nipped out a structure, got up on the rehearsal floor and improvised. Each scene was scripted, rewritten, workshopped, improvised again and refined. It was like riding multiple giraffes. The further this process went on, the more we began to understand the style we were evolving.

The creation of the play had moved beyond our flat kitchens by now to a performing arts centre, a kung fu gwoon and the New Zealand Arts Festival office. Most of the spaces were small and had their limitations. The kung fu school had a huge post right in the middle of the 'stage'. Adapting to changing spaces was to become part of the show's DNA.

We had a little bit of money from Creative Communities, but we found we didn't want to spend it on staging or props. It wasn't a poor theatre thing. It was a style thing. We talked about the way Australian company The Four Noels created a large array of memorable characters with nothing but a few props, wigs and costumes. Could we do it with even less?

We wanted to create the world in the audience's minds. Damon had recently come from performing in Oscar Kightley and Dave Armstrong's *Niu Sila* – which helped us see how it might be achievable to have two actors play lots of characters in the same scene. These days everyone is steeped in the visual language of film, so we made that work for us on stage by jump cutting between characters (and sometimes locations). It was exciting and we wondered



COULD TWO ACTORS PLAY A WHOLE TOWN?

how far we could push this idea – could two actors play a whole town having a massive brawl? Could they be the horses, and the riders and spectators, in a beach horse race? Could they be a goat?

From there on in it was head down, arse up and create. We were all juggling roles – creators, writers, co-producers, designers, directors and actors. A group of talented friends came in to help with the bits we couldn't do – lights, sound, dramaturgy, dance routines.

People liked the show. We got offers to do it again and the style of the piece made it perfect for touring. This brought the chance to refine the script and improve our performance of it, adapting it nearly everywhere we played. It was constant adjustment. Sometimes we didn't quite keep up. Nigel managed to almost knock Toby out in the fight scene one night with a finely adjusted uppercut.

Our favourite places on tour were the small town halls. In local communities the audiences felt *really* invested – they yelled things out and wanted to discuss it all

afterwards. In Luggate – a tiny country town just out of Wanaka – the hall we played at was exactly like the one in the story. We found ourselves looking out into the audience and seeing characters from the play – our tale about an Auckland property developer falling in love with a little provincial town. The local property mogul from Queenstown who had sponsored the evening was sitting in the front row and gave us cigars afterwards. The silky veil between reality and fiction dissolved.

A big part of making and performing the show was cracking each other up with characters we all recognised, and writing ourselves the most ridiculous gags we could dream up. Maybe that's partly why the play is still being performed now – by high school kids who were barely even born when we wrote it.

And maybe we also hit on some kind of truth in the story – questions we all have about our relationships to each other and to the land we live on. Questions which are still worth asking, thirteen years later.

ABOVE: *Wheeler's Luck* by Nigel Collins, Toby Leach and Damon Andrews, Epsom Girls Grammar. Image: Andi Crown.



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Badjelly (Tim Raby), Badjelly the Witch,
Tim Bray Productions 2016
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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Last Legs* by Roger Hall, Fortune Theatre. Image: George Wallace; *What You Will* by Zac Nicholls, Fortune Theatre. Image: George Wallace; *Alive in Berlin* by Jenny Powell, Kerian Varaine, Phoebe Lysbeth K., and Simon O'Connor, Talking House, Dunedin Fringe Festival. Image: Justin Spiers.

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DUNEDIN

BY ALEX WILSON

The Fortune Theatre's first season programmed by new Artistic Director Jonathon Hendry embraced work from Aotearoa with five out of seven shows being by New Zealand playwrights. The programming was intelligent, balancing taking risks on emerging playwrights such as with *My Dad's Boy* by Finnius Teppett, with old favourites such as Roger Hall, with a Circa co-production of *Last Legs*. Of additional note was a particularly riotous *Twelfth Night* produced in collaboration with the University of Otago's Department of Music, Theatre Studies and the Performing Arts.

The Fortune's 4x4 Young Playwright's initiative continued, producing work by emerging local talents Emer Lyons, Brian Luby, Beverley Martens and Lily Anne Rose in 2016. Meanwhile downstairs in the Murray Hutchison studio Improsaurus, Dunedin's critically acclaimed improv troupe, celebrated seven years working in the space and has now clocked up over 100 original fortnightly improvised tales.

Dunedin maintained its role as the country's hub of documentary theatre. Talking House's *Ropewalk* unearthed the stories of workers in a now abandoned rope-making factory. Kiri Bell created two companion pieces *Walking Between Worlds* and *Close Stranger* exploring Māori orphans growing up in Pakeha families, while Fran Kewene produced *Stories to Heal Violence* investigating experiences of family violence and the healing process in the years that follow. Kewene's work won the Best Storytelling Award at the Dunedin Fringe.

Fringe Festival this year was a bumper edition with nearly 70 events, a 25% increase on last year's festival, and is the final festival for

RESILIENT OUTPUT OF FRESH AND EXCITING WORK

director Josh Thomas. Highlights included a staging of Sam Brooks' *Queen*, and a new devised work, entitled *Life Stories: A Work Showing*, between Australian practitioner John Bolton and local performers – winning 'Best Theatre'. It must be noted that Allen Hall theatre manager Martyn Roberts' *Dark Matter*, a multimedia piece exploring what light can become at very limits of human perception, won 'Best of the Fringe' at the NZ Fringe Festival. The biennial Festival of the Arts rolled through town, with Director Nicholas McBryde back at its helm. Trick of the Light's Gothic tale of Dunedin con-men, *The Devil's Half-Acre*, returned home to a sell out season.

The Globe, once a powerhouse producing new writing from local writers such as James K. Baxter and Robert Lord has dominated their season with restaging of the classics by Schiller, Shakespeare and Ibsen. This arguably more conservative programming reflected the economic shifts in the city. Counterpoint, Dunedin's Youth Theatre company, produced three works – Sam Brooks' *Wine Lips*, Uther Dean's *Tiny Deaths* and *Christ Almighty!* by Natalie Medlock and Dan Musgrove – before entering into a hiatus for 2017.

While there are continued cuts on the Humanities at the University of Otago, Dunedin continues to maintain its resilient output of fresh and exciting work – despite, at times inhospitable climates, both meteorological and political.

Why I Wrote the Play I Wrote

WILLIAM BRANDT

on creating Verbatim with Miranda Harcourt

The genesis of this project was a matter of chance. Miranda Harcourt and I were both comparatively young. I hadn't written a play before – in fact I'd hardly written anything. I was primarily an actor. Miranda had recently been studying drama therapy in London, where she'd done a placement working with prisoners in Wormwood Scrubs Prison. She was keen to develop a piece of theatre which would work for prison inmates.

As luck would have it, we were both in the cast of Michael Hurst's 1991 production of *Lysistrata*, at Wellington's Downstage Theatre. We got talking and found that we were very much on the same page. We agreed that a play about murder would be a good idea, but we wanted to approach the subject in a different way. We wanted to avoid the usual tropes and examine an ordinary murder, if such a thing existed; a 'page three' murder, the kind which doesn't make the headlines.

We wanted a play which was socially useful, and which didn't eroticise, romanticise or sensationalise the subject. We wanted it to be a play which could be performed in a prison, in a school or a community hall. We wanted to examine murder as a social phenomenon, and as a human tragedy. We wanted to talk

about murder in a truthful way. We didn't want to make the murderer out to be a victim who couldn't make choices, but we equally didn't want to resort to 'evil' as an explanation.

We knew we had to speak to people who had committed murder, and to those whose lives had been affected by it. We were very fortunate that Kim Workman was head of the Prison Service at that time. His support made it possible for us to visit prisons up and down New Zealand. Men and women who had been convicted of murder were given the opportunity to speak to us. No one, of course, was compelled to speak. We also spoke to family members of people convicted of murder, to family of murder victims, to policemen, psychologists and others. This was a play which demanded an intensive and relatively costly research phase, and we were very fortunate to have the support of Creative New Zealand.

The research phase was the time when we began to shape our ideas. After every prison visit we would sit down and talk about what we'd learned. We were constantly challenged, emotionally and intellectually. We heard so many stories, all of them heart breaking, all of them powerful, and all of them different.

If is a very big word. I've learned that word if there's a lot in that word
if if there's just so many ifs, there's just so many ifs, it's just such a big

RISKY BEHAVIOUR AND PURE CHANCE

However, as time passed we thought we were beginning to identify some common elements. The most significant was chance. The vast majority of murders are a combination of two factors: a habit of risky behaviour and pure chance. The deliberately planned and executed killings of fiction are largely just that; fictional.

Two key creative decisions followed the research phase. The first was to create composite characters and stories. We originally assumed we'd find specific individuals on whom to base each of our characters, but realised this wasn't going to work. To achieve our stated goals we needed to weave many different stories we'd heard into one more widely representative story. So the dialogue of the play is actually a patchwork of utterances from different speakers, and the personal histories of the characters are similarly composite creations. But the second decision, which in a sense worked to counterbalance the first, was to stick to a purely verbatim format – apart from a few 'ands' and 'buts' all of the words in the play were spoken by interviewees. This made the drafting of the text a very complex and challenging process.

Constraints are a blessing, albeit in disguise. We also needed a play which could be performed by one person, and which was easily portable. This had a major impact on the writing. The play had to work with minimal props and set, and transitions had to be worked into the text so a solo performer could move smoothly from character to character.

Looking back, it's often hard to know what came first – the approach, or the rationale behind it. The process of writing is always a dialectic of some kind, with the subject making demands and the writer proposing solutions – or the other way round. But ultimately to happen at all a writing project relies, like a murder, on a concatenation of circumstances – on pure chance.

Verbatim was written 25 years ago and is still being performed today. It began as a one-woman show, performed memorably by Miranda and toured around the world. It has since seen other solo productions as well as ensembles. We are immensely proud and happy to see its continuing relevance.

ABOVE: *Verbatim* by William Brandt, devised by William Brandt and Miranda Harcourt, 1993.
Image: Martin Sykes.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *The Brave Little Monster Who Ran Away from the Sea* by Two Productions with Original Scripts Theatre School. Image: Tom Eason; *Hamlet: The Video Game (The Stage Show)* by Simon Peacock, The Court Theatre. Image: Nick King; *Moby Dick* by Two Productions. Image: Tom Eason.

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CHRISTCHURCH

BY TOM EASON AND HOLLY CHAPPELL-EASON

This year has marked an emerging sector boom in Christchurch. Y Not Productions, a new Pasifika theatre company, premiered their first show, *La'u Gagana*. Two companies launched their programmes in the Great Hall of the Arts Centre: Two Productions with *Moby Dick* and So Keen Productions with *Songs for a New World*. Playspace held a development season and premiere of *Braggadocious*, an improvised comedy with dinosaur figurines performed in a caravan. Young and diverse artists are beginning to make work for young and diverse audiences.

It seems the most successful work of the established companies incorporated a little of this flavour of youth and experiment too. The massive young cast of The Court Theatre's *Legally Blonde* brought fire and drive to the mainstage, as did their innovative performance of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. *He Kura e Huna Ana* as part of their Forge season (a Taki Rua Production) was an unmistakably important moment in Christchurch's theatre landscape: a sold out season for a show entirely in te reo, a strong follow up to *Waiora*. Free Theatre solidified their position as the premiere ambitious, avant-garde house with *The Black Rider*.

Bold moves make the future look even brighter. Lyttelton Arts Factory; a purpose built theatre space in Lyttelton shared with a primary school has presented prolifically, hosting their own work and that of Top Dog Theatre. Michael Bell's beautiful monstrosity, the proposed Andromeda Theatre has turned heads with its 'science fiction, purple, alien slug' looking building design. If this goes

AN EMERGING SECTOR BOOM

ahead it will house up to three theatre spaces, and countless opportunities for the emerging companies of Christchurch to present their work in an exciting venue, as well as being a bold enough architectural offer to attract international attention. The YMCA have created Papa Hou, their new 180 retractable seating, flexible layout theatre space. Papa Hou and their three converted squash court performance spaces have hosted countless touring and Christchurch company works; from REMAP dance developments to Two Productions youth show *Empire Drive* to glow-in-the-dark yoga.

A women in theatre hui was held at XCHC, going some ways to link Christchurch to the progression of the other major centres. An emerging artists' hui was also held where the sector came together, dreamed about the future and started to action that dream.

All in all, more support is needed for the emerging sector. The companies are here, making groundbreaking shows on zero dollar budgets. Christchurch could be the innovative theatre centre of the country. The buzz is beginning, collaboration is happening, big and little companies are coming together more, the next step is infrastructure and investment.

SPATIAL CONSTRAINTS

John Parker on designing for theatrical surprises.

I began my theatre designing in Auckland at Theatre Corporate. It was a perfect cold turkey rapid learning curve for a self-employed potter with a theatrical bent.

Corporate was a complete theatre company in the old sense, with everything done in-house allowing people to begin by training as assistants. There were basic rostra and flats all made using standard sheet sizes in modular heights. It was the Meccano Set principle that I still believe in – of endlessly reusing the same elements but in totally different ways, colours and surfaces, to wholly new effect. I hate waste but now sets are routinely trashed at pack-out. Unfortunately, remaking is cheaper than storage.

The Corporate shoebox space was infinitely flexible and seated around 100 in most configurations. So my low budget design thinking and expectations were not shaped by the limitations of a proscenium arch theatre. Thankfully I have never recovered.

Theatre is a visual experience. You are not watching a radio play. Theatre Corporate, with no house curtain, taught me the value of the preset. You have a captive audience sitting, waiting, who could be seduced into the ambience of the piece, perhaps without their knowledge.

Most of my work is abstract rather than realistic. I subscribe to the everywhere and nowhere concept of set design; the flexibility of an Elizabethan staging. The moment you definitely define something that is all it can be. Theatre is a totally collaborative team effort, greater than the sum of its creative parts. My designs tend to be minimal and rely heavily on lighting and AV. I am more interested in the psychology of the play rather than its geography. You have to think like a director and a lighting designer as you work. You are really there to clarify the text and provide the visual support for it to happen. I can justify all my designs from the text, but the venue is always there in your subconscious as well as the budget to a lesser extent.

There is no one fix fits all. There is no generality. Each design has to be appropriate for the particular space. The limiting factors are budget and intent – whether it is for proscenium arch, traverse, in the round, promenade, an open-air daytime slot, a schools show packed in and out up to three times a day, to an opera touring the main centres etc. It is all problem-solving exploiting the particular venue's qualities and idiosyncrasies.

There is something bloody-minded about me that responds to the challenge of

THERE IS NO ONE FIX FITS ALL



‘No you can’t.’ In new spaces, I am interested in working within the limitations but exploring ways to try to subvert them. I try to push the boundaries to the limits. For *Peer Gynt (recycled)*, which was an epic multi-location adventure at the ASB Waterfront Theatre, I used the maximum traditionally maskable depth, but for a future design there I am only using the first two metres back from the pros setting line.

The concept is most important and there will be low-tech solutions to even the most ambitious big ideas if you are prepared to think laterally. A fly tower and a revolve can solve many problems, but they can also create many others. Remember, ‘The bigger the budget, the bigger possible screw-up’.

I love reveals, surprises, coup de théâtre moments. You are like a magician performing sleight of hand. Sometimes the magic is important. Other times demystifying and showing all the skeletal ‘how’ can be a revelation that audiences love.

With kids shows sometimes the magic is right, but best is when they see the theatricality and feel they are in on the secret.

Audiences today are creatures of the sound bite with shorter attention spans. Modern

film editing has influenced the way they view theatre. They expect the instant change of location associated with cuts in film and they want scene changes to be seamless to not interrupt their concentration. So a design should allow the piece to flow in a cinematic way. The idea is to not lose the focus of the viewer, sometimes beginning dialogue for the next scene before the previous one has changed, like a cinematic cross-fade. One scene should imperceptibly segue into the next. It all depends on the writing coupled with the conventions the director sets up. These need to be consistent unless you are making some other point, like deciding on no props and then just introducing a single one for effect. I like using the set as a variation of the handheld prop, portable, often on wheels.

I go to a lot of different kinds of theatre in varied spaces, so I try to avoid designing the things that annoy and distract me while I am an audience member. My bottom design line is if I think what is up there works completely for the piece then I know at least one audience member will go home happy.

ABOVE: Examples of four different states of John Parker’s set for ATC production of *Peer Gynt (recycled)*.
Images: John Parker.

I DID THE LIGHTING

Lisa Maule on The Magdalena Aotearoa Trust.

In the early 90s, a theatre artist got handed a book about women's experimental theatre found at the Wellington Central Library. Ultimately it set in motion The Magdalena Aotearoa Trust and the start of a journey of connection and creativity for many that has spanned the globe: twenty years of exchange, with New Zealand artists on international tours and residencies, many newsletters and meetings, and workshops, often hosting guests from afar. The biggest event: a unique multi-arts international festival in Wellington and Paekakariki in 1999. Magdalena Aotearoa became a resource for creating and discussing artistic, training and economic structures to enable the practice of women in theatre and related art forms.

The resources and spaces for this work have been varied. We were in control of these and it was how much effort we put into these things that were important. Cups of tea, kitchen tables, cold community halls, French bread sticks, salami and cheese, musicians, laughter and inner drive are the resources that most come to mind.

The book that started it all contained in-depth writing about creative making process by women. *Magdalena: International Women's Experimental Theatre* documented the workshops, published writing and the first fiery festival of The Magdalena Project. Thought-provoking accounts of a variety of processes, initiated and driven by individual or collectives of women, it contained conversations that many New Zealand based female theatremakers were hungry for. A central question in the book: 'What is theatre work when it is made by women?'

The recipient of the library book was Sally Rodwell, theatremaker and founding member of Red Mole. Sally had started making work with Madeline McNamara. Both came to Wellington after different experiences overseas. I remember the story being that Sally and Madeline, on reading the book, immediately announced they were going to meet the women who were within its pages. Sally and Madeline developed a show called *Crow Station* inspired by misfit and homeless people they'd encountered in the

USA, including characters nesting in the New York subway. I did the lighting. We went to Magdalena Project festival in Cardiff, Wales in 1994.

The work of Magdalena Aotearoa has always seemed amorphous. Structure, purpose and output have always been able to change. However, throughout persists the thread of exchange – a will to capture and harness the creativity that can exist in the space between people. This comes from different places for different women who touch this thread. For me in Cardiff at age 23, it was the challenge and ownership of contributing to the whirlwind energy of Sally and Madeline and others. It was the opportunity to travel and be amongst laughter. And also to be amongst the high level conversation and critical thinking that occurred through the making and experiencing of performances and workshops.

These conversations have been important to me, as to others. In some ways Magdalena Aotearoa exists for the exchange of ideas and inspiration. To develop critical language, to boost people's ability to find their own ways and be parts of the conversations they want to be part of. One of the aims of the Trust is to encourage the use of, respect for and knowledge of diverse theatrical forms and performance events, expressing the political and cultural realities of the many different groups of women in Aotearoa.

There are Magdalena offshoots and festivals all around the world. Created with limited funds and equipment, but with dedication to making space for the development that arises from these events. Jill Greenhalgh, a Magdalena Project founder writes in the book *The Magdalena Project@25 – Legacy and Challenge*, "From a concrete event a ripple effect of activities and newfound relationships provokes new collaborations and performance works along with even more questions and debate. As the body of work expands, so too has a progressively layered critical consciousness and confidence."



Crow Station appearing at a Magdalena Project Festival started lasting friendships and connections with other participants from Europe and South America. Then Magdalena Aotearoa's collaboration with Māori women to create an autonomous festival opened up a new field of dialogue for the Magdalena Project, and inspired Magdalena Australia for their festival in 2003.

Documenting and writing has always been part of the Magdalena Project. Many people hungrily devoured their regular publication *The Open Page*. Magdalena Aotearoa's quarterly newsletters were a resource for 12 years, sharing events and thoughts from the network. Now we use different technologies.

Sharing information, documenting, making relationships, and having the will to organise, these essentials sum up the resources of The Magdalena Project. It's the space we thread together, through our attention to the details in organising, our need to communicate, our investment in relationships, and our memories that we trace in our work.

ABOVE: Moira Aberdeen, Janet Dunn, Madeline McNamara and Helen Varley Jamieson. Image: Lisa Maule.

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STATE OF OUR STAGE

*Kathryn Burnett and Playmarket provide
an account of recent national hui.*

As part of a new role to provide discourse for the theatre sector, Playmarket invited over 500 practitioners to take part in discussions in four centres. We wanted to know what people thought is working and what needs attention.

Kathryn Burnett facilitated, using an Open Space Technology structure. This meant discussion topics were decided by participants and discussed in smaller groups. Participants were invited to move between conversations. Each group recorded key points, and action points were developed.

Several topics emerged in some form at all four hui: mentoring/training, funding, building audience, diversity, career sustainability and how we might better share information and resources.

The first weekend in July we gathered at Fortune Theatre, Dunedin on Saturday and Hagley Theatre Company, Christchurch on Sunday. The following weekend at Te Haukāinga, Wellington and Q Theatre, Auckland.

DUNEDIN

In Dunedin there was discussion on how **script development** could be improved.

What resources, protocols and support are needed? **Action points:** to investigate flexible development processes and protocols around dramaturgy and encourage development of a dramaturg and researcher database.

Cultural identity in NZ theatre was discussed: how do we reflect better the diversity of our population? And, in conversation about what is the **moral responsibility of education providers** it was felt the professional theatre network and education sector need to work more closely to provide graduates with realistic expectations and outcomes.

A stimulating conversation was had on New Zealand 1970 versus 2017 – **how should NZ theatre reflect and respond to being a different nation, society, and economy? Changing demographics** were discussed – is there a direct relationship between population size and sustaining professional theatre? Who feels that they can come into ‘our house’ and how does that impact on what stories we are telling? How sustainable is theatre if changes in the general population – potential audiences – aren’t acknowledged? **Changes to Funding** – while business sponsorship and private



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patronage had increased over the last few decades, people's disposable income is now contested across more entertainment choices.

Action points: share funding knowledge and create initiatives that develop confidence in this area (e.g. through workshop). Revisit the idea of a theatre advisory service organisation, particularly to aid in this area.

Venues, a common topic nationally, were discussed. Is there a relationship between creature comforts and the ability to attract an audience? Are theatre spaces adequate in the 21st century world? Are we making suitable work for existing venues? A Māori manaakitanga model was suggested where practitioners are protected, educated and able to access resources. **How do we retain institutional knowledge and skills?** Investing in people through training and mentorship is a huge part of the stability and future of the local theatre sector.

CHRISTCHURCH

It was not surprising that **venues** featured at the Christchurch hui. With the landscape changed it was felt many in the local industry

were unaware of the spaces available. Discussion focused on identification of new and revitalised spaces. The theatre community could become more actively involved in council decision-making process pertaining to venues.

Audiences: the community is resource poor, but research, improved collaboration and information sharing are key to identifying and developing theatre audiences and offering an accessible, non-elitist experience. **How to get audiences to take risks in their viewing choices?** Suggestions included getting in touch with the Canterbury Arts Audience Development Project, instituting pay-what-you-can shows and offering free tickets to first-time theatre attendees. **Action point:** talk to theatres in Christchurch and nationally around what might work best for a pay-what-you-can ticket model.

The recent Christchurch **Women in Theatre** Hui inspired practitioners to find solutions to the challenges they are facing, raised the importance of women supporting and

ABOVE: Meg Rollandi speaking at *State of Our Stage*, Te Haukāinga, Wellington. Image: Philip Merry.

empowering each other, and being unapologetic about their skills and presence in the industry. **Supporting playwrights:**

this discussion focused on mentorship, writing groups, play readings and exploring opportunities to train audiences to better understand a play's development.

An **action point:** create an online platform for Christchurch playwrights and actors to connect.

Funding: discussion revolved around better understanding of funding opportunities and matching project objectives to funder's priorities. Recommendations included not working on applications in isolation. **Theatre prices going up, actors wages going down:** it was suggested that CNZ Tōtara-funded theatres should be required to offer some heavily discounted ticket prices. Some also suggested actors would love to see a return to some form of company structure model, or a retainer system for employment stability.

Creating theatre community in

Christchurch: suggestions included creating an industry night in terms of ticket prices across all local theatres; and regular get togethers with revolving content. Sharing of information on venues, listings and resources is to be encouraged. An **action point:** to look at other industry discount practice around the country and to establish a Facebook group for local theatre practitioners.

A pay parity in theatre discussion highlighted the need for transparency on pay rates, particularly for women, and a shift in mind-set around sharing how much individuals earn. **Action point:** investigate a workshop on negotiation skills for women, building confidence to ask the right questions and discuss money.

WELLINGTON

The next weekend in Wellington discussion began on **opening up audience data:** the potential of developing a body to hold data that people could feed into.

Māori and Pasifika led theatre:

Te Haukāinga was suggested as a great example of how funded organisations can develop a support system, resources and help independent companies. How do we avoid tokenistic partnerships and have conversation to get past that? Build on the momentum of festivals (e.g. Kia Mau), to springboard into a long term vision. **Action points** included: establishing a body to work as advocate, lobbyist, and watchdog, finding resources or a purpose built Māori/Pasifika-led theatre, and looking at capability for developing techs, producers, etc. Creating a body to carry the role that otherwise Māori and Pasifika companies and artists are carrying themselves.

There was also discussion about **the necessity of documenting our work and taking note of our history** – the ongoing challenge of documenting an ephemeral art form, especially devised and improvised work. **Reviewing** writes the production into history. Can there be training or development that raises consciousness around the craft?

Preservation of theatre skills: to re-evaluate theatre styles and trends we need to be aware of the history. We should be regularly submitting to Theatre Aotearoa database. The importance of the industry passing on practical skills in voice, movement, design etc was also emphasised.

The Future – what sort of performing arts for what sort of people? Discussed was defining communities, and marketing and communication to different audiences: important especially when touring between urban and regional areas. Then there was the **'prescriptive NZ problem'**: how a model of everything being reported, measured and competed for has stifled creativity. Funding from corporates, gaming and philanthropic trusts is also often prescriptive.

Holding onto emerging practitioners: how can the industry be financially viable and more secure for practitioners?

The onus is on us as the industry to put pressure on institutions to prioritise this. Emerging artists aren't necessarily connected – they can lack the same relationships with people and spaces. Fellowships and mentorships are needed across all roles.

Action points include: encouraging funding bodies to think about mentorship as a key requirement of funding, especially within large organisations such as festivals; using networking events and sharing-spaces for people to learn from each other; and advocating for tertiary providers to engage more with the industry.

Mental health and wellbeing: how do we avoid burnout in an under-resourced industry and create safe spaces where people have support to express how they're feeling? An attitude of 'completing the work required' sees tech crews working overtime. Exhaustion results from taking on more work than is good to get sufficient income. There is a clear need for a shift in kaupapa to one of caring, especially at the beginning of processes. **Action points:** extend ETNZ risk assessment material and look to models in other sectors on how to train and educate in managing wellness.

Artistic freedom: funding organisations are in effect censors. Are the people deciding whether a project goes ahead always qualified to do so?

Networking and sharing resources between companies to reduce costs: do we create an 'arts bank' that holds equipment, assets, people's time, and skills – a system of exchange rather than money?

Advocacy: if we don't have the right data, we can't advocate successfully. A national live performance network could set up a business plan, enacted by a marketing company. How do we convince all educators, media and politicians of the essential importance of the arts? **Action points:** advocate for arts reporters, just as there are sports journalists. Consider establishment of a national live performance network.



Funding: discussion encouraged practitioners to look beyond traditional funding bodies. It was suggested that people are generally kindly towards the arts. TAB for instance are looking for community partnerships – justifications and outcomes are generally not required. Some sponsors are more interested in contra options. Look to organisations such as Chamber of Commerce to connect with business opportunities.

AUCKLAND

The next day in Auckland raised a new topic: **how can we celebrate NZ theatre history?** The debt we owe to the people who set up our industry. Do we need a national theatre hall of fame or website? There's an opportunity to focus on this in NZ Theatre Month 2018.

Another group discussed **development and dramaturgy: what, who and how: an interrogation of the role.** The group decided the dramaturg is an essential and difficult role. Do our dramaturgs need training?

ABOVE: Arthur Meek and Geraldine Brophy at *State of Our Stage*, Te Haukāinga, Wellington. Image: Philip Merry.



How do you share what's working and not working? Should CNZ Tōtara organisations be doing more development proportionate to their funding? Development time is generally too short. Mentoring is necessary, particularly for Māori. **Action point:** Script advisors/dramaturgs to set up their own Facebook page to increase visibility.

Another conversation focussed on **improving ticketing processes**. There was much discussion about the barriers to buying tickets, and added charges. Do we need ticket booths offering last minute deals?

Action points: Promote investigation into ticketing charges. Find ways ticketing resources can be shared.

More development and training for playwrights. Developing plays is not the same as developing playwrights. There's not enough transparency around what mainstages want. **Action points:** encourage emerging practitioners to ask for advice. Each professional theatre company should

be charged with providing two mentorships each year.

Building audiences arose in Auckland too. Suggestions included instituting a pay-what-you-can model, different performance times to suit different audiences, and re-examining if the established trappings of theatre culture are still relevant. Suburban theatres could build local audiences more by putting on local stories.

Is it possible to share NZ productions more? Establishing more touring circuits is good for all. **Have we got too much infrastructure and not enough craft?** Structures directly influence what we make.

Better use of resources: do we need an independent national body or hub that pools resources, holds information, communicates with industry and holds an advocacy role. Possibly this could mostly be online. **Action point:** investigate if Tour-Makers (or similar) could expand to include a person dedicated to establishing this hub?

A fuller transcript of the discussions is available from Playmarket.

ABOVE: Maraea Rakuraku at *State of Our Stage*, Te Haukāinga, Wellington. Image: Philip Merry.

SCRIPT ADVICE

Script Advisor Allison Horsley on finding a safe home.

As this is my first contribution to *Playmarket Annual*, I'd like to express my gratitude to the playwrights and other theatre makers who have welcomed me in my new(ish) role. It is an honour to support your work.

I've been thinking about the invisible formulas we use to determine whether a play 'works' within a particular space. A venue being a good fit for a play, or the play being a good fit for the venue, seems to be this strange thing that theatre practitioners often agree upon – like it's an observable, testable quality. Many of us have seen plays that felt swallowed up in a big space, or plays that have already outgrown their small venue. We know when the fit doesn't feel right even if we can't describe why. It's a Goldilocks kind of thing.

Recently a playwright friend of mine suggested that the process of matching play with venue is like finding the right home for a family. It's not necessarily about the number of people in the family, or the amount of space in the home. It's about the congruence of scope and scale and tone and feel. A family of twelve might get along just fine in a two-bedroom house due to who they are and how they behave together – their 'story' – but just down the street a family of four with big problems and big, conflicting personalities might be cramped in a six-bedroom home.

In this way, maybe plays are like families in that they need a place that matches them aesthetically, physically and spiritually, providing shelter and safety while leaving them a little room to grow. It's not about where the play is set, how big the cast is or how much craziness we can cram into the plot: it's about how large a space and how many audience members' attention it can hold through its ability to speak to the human condition.

Take, for example, Hone Kouka's play *Waiora* and Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. Both autobiographical to an extent, and both can fill what I consider to be a larger (400 plus seat) space. Whereas Kouka's play is set out-of-doors and features a cast of eleven, O'Neill's centres on five characters in a small lounge. On the page the plays may appear to be very different 'sizes'. Yet, because each illuminates inter-generational, almost spiritual conflicts that transcend the everyday – each traverses the path of pedestrian to reach the epic – the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. In both plays, the specificity of location, character and circumstance begets universality that touches a large audience.

I suspect because of the prevalence of film and television, sometimes we writers

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automatically, unconsciously think we are a camera when writing plays. As though the entire audience will see the play from our same literal and sometimes figurative point of view. As though the audience will be inside a camera that can change position in the room and zoom in to absorb a character's expression and then zoom back out to take in the entire scene.

But that's not how it works. Depending on the size and configuration of the performance space, audience members probably will be immobile the whole time, they will be seated in a giant block and the seating area could be dozens of metres wide or deep. That leaves room for a multiplicity of perspectives and distances that our writing will need to traverse. Our challenge is to craft a story that draws every single one of these people in, emotionally and psychologically.

When appropriate, I would encourage us all to consider the spaces that would best house our existing work and give some thought to this when we're writing new stuff. Seek out the right home or create the right home, or if you're writing a play for a specific space—or house, or home—consider the characters and story best suited to occupy it.

And read more plays. We all need to read more plays and see more plays. If you've seen something that works great in a particular space, ask if you can read it. It can't hurt to ask. If you want to write something for a particular venue or company, ask to read other work that has been produced there successfully. Borrow scripts from a library or a theatre or a university. Ask friends and acquaintances if you can read plays they've directed, or acted in, or designed. Ask Playmarket. Ask senior members of the profession – in my personal experience there is a direct correlation between years lived and books accumulated – and then imagine how the plays you've read would work in different spaces and learn from hypothetical mistakes. It's fun.

I have worked with one playwright who postulates that, at the end of the day, all characters just want to get 'home'. May all of our characters, and the stories that accompany them, find the right home.

ABOVE: *Waiora: Te u Kai Po - The Homeland* by Hone Kouka, The Court Theatre. Image: Wendy Riley.

THEATRE CALENDAR 2017

Professional Productions of NZ Plays 1 August 2016 – 31 July 2017

TOURING & INTERNATIONAL

Hinepau based on the book by Gavin Bishop, devised by the original company Capital E National Theatre for Children NZ Tour
27 Jul – 22 Sep 2016

Thirsty by Ali Foa'i
BATS Wellington
9 – 13 Aug 2016,
and Measina Festival
1 – 3 Dec 2016

Enigma
by Alexander Sparrow
Wellington
9 – 13 Aug 2016
Garnet Station Auckland,
East Street Nelson,
Centrepoint Palmerston
North, Cavern Club
Wellington
16 Jun – 15 Jul 2017

Sister Anzac
by Geoff Allen
Meteor Theatre Hamilton,
Q Theatre Auckland
18 – 28 Aug 2016

State Highway 48
by Chris Williams
Hamilton
19 – 27 Aug 2016
Napier, Wanganui,
Rotorua, Taupo,
Putaruru, Tauranga
5 – 29 Oct 2016

When We Dead Awaken
by Ibsen, adapted
by Iris Henderson and
Catriona Tipene
Walking Shadows
Centrepoint, Napier

20 – 23 Aug 2016
and BATS
27 Sep – 1 Oct 2016

Coriander
by Jess Brien
BATS 24 – 27 Aug 2016;
Sydney Fringe Festival
20 – 24 Sep 2016;
and Dunedin Fringe,
Christchurch
17 – 18 Mar 2017

Edinburgh Festival Fringe, UK 5 – 29 Aug 2016

Daffodils by Rochelle
Bright; *The Creeps* by
Catherine Waller; *Beards!*
Beards! Beards! by Ralph
McCubbin Howell; *The*
Bookbinder by Ralph
McCubbin Howell; *If*
There's Not Dancing
at the Revolution, I'm
Not Coming... by Julia
Croft; *Keep out of my*
Box (and other useful
Advice) by Torum Heng;
On The Conditions and
Possibilities of Hillary
Clinton Taking Me as Her
Young Lover by Arthur
Meek and Geoff Pinfield;
One Day Moko by Tim
Carlsen; *Promise and*
Promiscuity by Jane
Austen and Penny Ashton;
and *The South Afreakins*
by Robyn Paterson.

The Guru of Chai
by Jacob Rajan and
Justin Lewis
Indian Ink Theatre
Company
The Piano Christchurch
1 – 3 Sep 2016;
The Cultch, Vancouver,

Canada
1 – 5 Nov 2016; and
Belvoir St Theatre,
Sydney, Australia
16 May – 14 Jun 2017

Commander Claire and
the Pirates of Provence
and *The Complete*
History of the Royal New
Zealand Navy Abridged
by Gregory Cooper
Navy Players Theatre
NZ Tour
9 Aug – 28 Oct 2016

Under the Same Moon
by Renee Liang
Arts on Tour NZ Tour
6 – 30 Sep 2016

Not in Our Neighbourhood
by Jamie McCaskill
Tikapa Productions and
Taki Rua, Invercargill,
Fortune Theatre Dunedin,
The Court Theatre
Christchurch
8 – 24 Sep 2016 and
Centrepoint
10 – 24 Jun 2017

Lola's Grave Mistake
by Ian Harman
Centrepoint,
Fringe Bar Wellington
15 – 30 Sep 2016

Shot Bro: Confessions of
a Depressed Bullet
by Rob Mokaraka
Mookalucky Productions
North Island Tour
15 Sep 2016 – 28 Jul 2017

No Holds Bard
by Natalie Medlock,
Dan Musgrove and
Michael Hurst

Royale Productions
Titirangi Theatre
Auckland, Hawkes Bay
Arts Festival
16 Sep – 10 Oct 2016
and Artworks Theatre
Waiheke
27 – 28 Jan 2017

Vanilla Miraka
by Hayley Sproull
Basement Theatre
Auckland, BATS
20 Sep – 1 Oct 2016

Banging Cymbal
Clanging Gong
by Jo Randerson
Barbarian Productions
Basement Theatre
21 – 24 Sep 2016
and Fringe World Perth,
Australia
7 – 11 Feb 2017

Shu's Song by Laura
Gaudin, Rachel Callinan
and Gina Moss
Capital E National Theatre
for Children; Wellington,
South Island Tour
24 Sep – 14 Nov 2016;
and Capital E National
Arts Festival 18 Mar 2017

The White Guitar
by Fa'amoana John
Luafutu, Matthias Luafutu
and Malo Luafutu
The Conch
Hamilton, Gisborne,
Napier, Rotorua,
Tauranga, Nelson
Arts Festival
30 Sep – 21 Oct 2016

Guji Guji by Chih-Yuan
Chen adapted for the
stage by Peter Wilson

Little Dog Barking
Productions
Awesome Festival
Western Australia,
Hawkes Bay Arts Festival,
Nelson Arts Festival
2 – 15 Oct 2016
Nanchong International
Puppet Festival
1 – 6 Jun 2017 and Seoul
ASSITEJ Korea Festival
19 – 30 Jul 2017

So/Othello
by Regan Taylor
Te Rēhia Theatre Company
Hawkes Bay Arts Festival,
Nelson Arts Festival
13 – 19 Oct 2016 and
Upsurge Festival
5 Apr 2017

Fire on the River
by Graeme John Weber
Playhouse Glen Eden,
Spotlight Theatre
Papatoetoe, The
Pumphouse Takapuna
6 – 30 Oct 2016

The Bookbinder by
Ralph McCubbin Howell
Trick of the Light Theatre
Awesome Festival
Western Australia
7 – 10 Oct 2016;
Lincoln Center New York
USA; Riverside Theaters
Sydney Australia;
Christchurch Arts Centre;
and ASSITEJ Cape Town
South Africa,
4 Mar – 21 May 2017

Don Juan by A Slightly
Isolated Dog
Hawkes Bay Arts Festival,
Nelson Arts Festival,
Q Theatre
8 Oct – 12 Nov 2016
Circa Theatre, Wellington,
Hamilton Gardens Festival
20 Jan – 25 Feb 2017

La Vie Dans une Marionett
by the White Face Crew
Hawkes Bay Arts Festival
9 Oct 2016 and Capital E
National Arts Festival
25 Mar 2017

Ollie is a Martian
by Ollie Cox and

Barnie Duncan
Theatre Beating
Awesome Festival
Western Australia
10 – 14 Oct 2016

The Book Club
by Roger Hall
Andrew Kay and
Associates
Kings Head Theatre
London UK
11 Oct – 5 Nov 2016

Me & Robert McKee
by Greg McGee
Lost Boys Productions
Guildhall Theatre
Derby, UK
12 – 15 Oct 2016

*No More Dancing in the
Good Room* by Chris
Parker and Jo Randerson
Hawkes Bay Arts Festival,
Nelson Arts Festival
14 – 21 Oct 2017

Paper Shaper
by Peter Wilson and
Tim Denton
Little Dog Barking
Hawkes Bay Arts Festival
14 – 16 Oct 2016;
Hamilton Gardens
Festival
24 – 25 Feb 2017; and
Paekakariki and BATS
18 – 22 Apr 2017

Miss Jean Batten
by Phil Ormsby
Flaxworks Theatre
Nelson Arts Festival
16 – 17 Oct 2016 and
Hamilton Gardens
Festival, Circa Theatre
Southland Arts Festival
26 Feb – 29 Apr 2017

*A Lion in the Meadow
and Other Stories* by
Margaret Mahy adapted
by Tim Bray, Tim Bray
Productions
The Pumphouse, Kaitaia,
Kerikeri, Whangarei,
Hamilton, Tauranga
17 – 31 Oct 2016

Sing it to my Face
by Jo Randerson and
Julian Raphael

Barbarian Productions,
Nelson Arts Festival
19 – 20 Oct 2016
and Festival of Colour
Wanaka 4 Apr 2017

Promise and Promiscuity
by Jane Austen and
Penny Ashton,
Globe Theatre Dunedin
28 Oct – 5 Nov 2016
Brisbane Cabaret
Festival, Adelaide Cabaret
Festival Australia
10 – 18 Jun 2017

The Biggest
by Jamie McCaskill
Tikapa Productions
Hannah Playhouse
Wellington
29 Oct – 12 Nov 2016
Auckland Arts Festival,
Q Theatre
9 – 20 Mar 2017

*Riding in Cars with
(Mostly Straight) Boys*
by Sam Brooks
Smoke Labours
Auckland, Whangarei,
Wellington Tour
7 Nov – 16 Dec 2016

Krishnan's Dairy
by Jacob Rajan
Indian Ink Theatre
Company
Kolkata, Bangalore and
Delhi, India
11 – 19 Nov 2016

I Am Tasha Fierce
by Rose Kirkup
Everybody Cool
Lives Here
Basement Theatre
15 – 19 Nov 2016
and BATS
28 Mar – 1 Apr 2017

Rukahu by James Nokise
Not Even Productions
BATS
15 – 19 Nov 2016 and
Basement Theatre
4 – 8 Jul 2017

*Cynthia Fortitude's
Farewell – Her Second*
by Helen Moulder
Willow Productions
Garnet Station, Riverbank

Whangarei,
Howick Little Theatre
24 Nov – 11 Dec 2016

Little Kowhai Tree by
Peter Wilson, Little Dog
Barking and Capital E
Live, North Island Tour
16 Dec 2016 – 19 Jan 2017
and Capital E
11 – 15 Jul 2017

Jekyll and Hyde
by A Slightly Isolated Dog
Circa Theatre
20 Jan – 11 Feb
and Basement Theatre
4 – 15 Jul 2017

Coaltown Blues
by Mervyn Thompson
Chris Green
Marton 29 Jan 2017;
Hawera 11 Feb 2017;
and Waikato Tour
7 May – 10 Jun 2017

Devine by Recollective
Theatre Company
Basement Theatre,
Oneonesix Whangarei,
Turner Centre Kerikeri
7 – 18 Feb 2017

Bleeding Black by
Christopher Watts
The Colab
NZ Fringe Festival
14 – 17 Feb and
Centrepont
3 – 4 Mar 2017

The South Afreakins
by Robyn Paterson
Impi Theatre Company
Vault Festival, London UK
15 – 19 Feb 2017

de Sade
by Alexander Sparrow
Cavern Club,
Garnet Station
16 Feb 2017 – 4 Mar 2017;
and Garnet Station,
Centrepont, Cavern Club
16 Jun – 15 Jul 2017

May Contain Sex Scenes
by Pat-A-Cake Productions
NZ Fringe Festival
17 Feb – 4 Mar 2017;
Nelson Fringe Festival
5 May 2017; and

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REHEARSAL SPACE

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274 TARANAKI ST

TAKIRUA.CO.NZ (04)385 3110 INFO@TAKIRUA.CO.NZ

1/40 Colombo St,
Newtown, Wellington
19 – 22 Jul 2017

Rapanui the Song of Stone
by Lisa Allen
NZ Fringe Festival
18 Feb – 21 Feb 2017
Dunedin Fringe Festival,
Christchurch Arts Centre
16 – 26 Mar 2017

The Floating Theatre
by Stephen Bain
Hamilton Gardens
Festival, Auckland
Fringe Festival
20 Feb – 11 Mar 2017

Two Girls One Shop
by Millie Hanford and
Maddie Harris
NZ Fringe, Christchurch,
Dunedin Fringe,
23 Feb – 15 Mar 2017

*Allergic to Love: Curse of
the 80s* by Tom Knowles
NZ Fringe The Grand
2 – 4 Mar 2017
San Diego Fringe Festival,
Tijuana Cultural Centre
Mexico
22 – 27 Jun 2017

Cellfish
by Rob Mokaraka,
Miriam McDowell and
Jason Te Kare, Silo and
Auckland Arts Festival,
Q Theatre and Te Oro
8 – 17 Mar 2017

The First Time
by Courtney Rose Brown
BATS
16 – 25 Mar 2017
Lower Hutt Little Theatre
25 – 26 May 2017 and
Circa Theatre
21 Jun – 1 Jul 2017

Anzac Eve
by Dave Armstrong
Armstrong Creative and
Tour-Makers NZ Tour
21 Mar – 6 May 2017

He Kura e Huna Ana
by Hōhepa Waitoa
Taki Rua
Te Waipounamu tour
24 Mar – 8 Apr 2017

*Mata and the Mysterious
Musical Maunga*
by Jamie McCaskill
and Craig Geenty
Capital E National
Theatre Festival, Te Papa
25 Mar 2017; and Capital E
17 – 22 Jul 2017

Mr and Mrs Alexander
by David Ladderman
and Lizzie Tollemache
Rollicking Entertainment
Fortune Theatre,
Circa Theatre
29 Mar – 6 May 2017

Hudson and Halls Live!
by Kip Chapman with
Todd Emerson and Sophie
Roberts Silo Theatre
Upsurge Festival, Festival
of Colour Wanaka
4 – 10 Apr 2017

*Weave – Yarns with New
Zealanders* by Kate McGill
Alacrity Productions
Basement Theatre
4 – 15 Apr 2017
Garnet Station
14 – 16 Jul 2017

The Dunstan Creek Séance
by David Ladderman and
Lizzie Tollemache
Rollicking Entertainment
Fortune Theatre,
Southland Arts Festival
5 Apr – 13 May 2017

Her by The Playspace
Theatre Company
The Arts Centre
Christchurch, Nelson
Fringe Festival
6 Apr – 1 May 2017

No Science to Goodbye
by Annabel Wilson
Ravel Productions
Festival of Colour
Wanaka, BATS
7 – 29 Apr 2017

*The Messy Magic
Adventure* by David
Ladderman and
Lizzie Tollemache
Rollicking Entertainment
Circa Theatre, Southland
Arts Festival
18 Apr – 14 May 2017

Olive Copperbottom
by Charles Dickens
and Penny Ashton
Basement Theatre,
Circa Theatre
18 Apr – 27 May 2017
Toronto Fringe Festival;
and Winnipeg Fringe
Festival Canada
6 – 30 Jul 2017

Songs of the Sea
by Peter Wilson music
by Stephen Gallagher
Capital E National Theatre
for Children
North Island Tour
20 Apr – 23 Jun 2017

*E Kore a Muri e Hokia
(Mo and Jess Kill Susie)*
by Gary Henderson
translated by Ani-Piki
Tuari with Hania Douglas,
Te Aorere Pewhairangi
and Tawaroa Kawana
Te Rēhia Theatre
Company
Te Pou Theatre,
Oneonesix Whangarei,
Te Ahu Kaitaia
26 Apr – 11 May 2017;
and Basement Theatre
27 Jun – 1 Jul 2017

Gloria's Handbag
by Helen Moulder and
Sue Rider
Willow Productions
Arts on Tour NZ Tour
27 Apr – 4 Jun 2017

Escape from Gloriavale
by Brynley Stent
Q Theatre and BATS
2 – 13 May 2017

A Doris Day Special
by Ali Harper
Ali-Cat Productions
Taupo, Tauranga,
Thames, Auckland Live
3 – 14 May 2017

DJ Trump
by Alexander Sparrow
Nelson, Picton,
Queenstown, Garnet
Station, East Street
Nelson, Paekakariki,
Centrepoint, Cavern Club
3 May – 15 Jul 2017

The President by
Alexander Sparrow
Centrepoint, BATS, The
Classic Auckland, Picton,
Christchurch, Timaru,
Dunedin 28 Oct – 26 Nov
2016; Cavern Club 13 Apr
2016; Garnet Station
17 – 18 Jun 2017; and
Cavern Club 15 Jul 2017

The Pickle King
by Jacob Rajan and
Justin Lewis
Indian Ink Theatre
Company NZ Tour
4 May – 9 Sep 2017

(A Smidge of) Pidge
by Sherilee Kahui
Meteor Hamilton
4 May 2017 and Nelson
Fringe Festival
29 Jun – 1 Jul 2017

Outliers, Ensemble
Impact NZ Tour
8 May – 23 Jun 2017

Sons of a Bitch
by Amelia Dunbar and
Emma Newborn
The Bitches' Box
Auckland Live, BATS
9 – 20 May 2017

Four Flat Whites in Italy
by Roger Hall
Ben McDonald
Productions, NZ Tour
10 May – 18 Jun 2017

A Girl Named Ostrich
by Charlotte Pleasants
Paris Fringe Festival
25 May 2017

Tiki Taane Mahuta
by Tānemahuta Gray
Taki Rua and Aotearoa
Aerial Theatre Company
National Tour
19 May – 20 Jun 2017

*An Unseasonable Fall of
Snow* by Gary Henderson
Alex Ewan
Actors Pulse Studio,
Sydney, Australia
30 May – 3 Jun 2017

ReHavaiki
by Asalemo Tofete
South Melbourne Town

Hall, Australia 2 Jun 2017
and The Bowery Theatre,
Melbourne Australia
14 Jul 2017

Larger than Life
by Chris Rex Martin and
Tanui Tukiwaho
Te Rēhia Theatre Company
Centrepoint, Circa, Te Pou
Theatre, Auckland Live
8 Jun – 1 Jul 2017

*Kororāreka: The Ballad of
Maggie Flynn*
by Paolo Rotondo
Red Leap Theatre
Q Theatre, Russell,
Kerikeri, Oneonesix
Whangarei
9 – 24 Jun 2017

*The Road That Wasn't
There* by Ralph McCubbin
Howell
Trick of the Light Theatre
Auckland Live,
Expressions Upper Hutt,
Whitireia Theatre
11 – 23 Jul 2017

Skin Tight
by Gary Henderson
Quartet Theatre
Company
Theaterwelten Festival
Rudolstadt Germany,
Spots op West
Festival Belgium
22 Jun – 8 Jul 2017

Hinepau
based on the book
by Gavin Bishop,
devised by the
original company
Taki Rua Te Reo Māori
Season NZ Tour
24 Jul – 29 Sep 2017

How I Met my Father
by Rhian Hill
NZ Tour
26 Jul – 24 Aug 2017

North by Northwest
adapted from the
Alfred Hitchcock film
by Carolyn Burns
Theatre Royal Bath, UK
31 Jul – 12 Aug 2017

AUCKLAND

Auckland Theatre Company

The Eel and Sina
by Jono Soo Choon
Schools Tour
4 – 18 Nov 2016

Peer Gynt (Recycled)
by Eli Kent
7 – 19 Mar 2017

Here & Now Festival:
Boys adapted from Greg
McGee's *Foreskin's
Lament* by Eleanor
Bishop; *Mouth* by Niu
Wave Collective; *Dance
Like Everybody's Watching*
devised by the cast.
21 – 24 Apr 2017

Māui me te Rā
by Rutene Spooner
Schools Tour
8 – 26 May 2017

*When Sun and
Moon Collide*
by Briar Grace-Smith
22 Jun – 5 Jul 2017

Basement Theatre

Hippolytus Veiled
by Nathan Joe
16 – 20 Aug 2016

Mating in Captivity
by Oliver Page
16 – 27 Aug 2016

Centaur by Jesse Griffin
11 – 15 Oct 2016

Madwoman/Gentlewoman
by Kate Bartlett
12 – 15 Oct 2016

Brown – It's Complicated
by Antonia Stehlin
25 – 29 Oct 2016

Thomus
by Ash Jones
6 – 10 Sep 2016

Hook-Up Boys
by Bruce Brown
BRB Inc
20 – 24 Sep 2016

Valerie
by Robin Kelly with Tom
Broome and Cherie Moore



FORTUNE THEATRE CO

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Last Tapes Theatre
Company
27 Sep – 8 Oct 2016

Lucinda The Cactus Girl
by Lizzie Morris
18 – 22 Oct 2016

Zen Dog: Satori
by Mick Innes and
Roberto Nascimento
Rebels and Robots
1 – 5 Nov 2016

A Ghost Tale
by Benjamin Teh
8 – 12 Nov 2016

*The Opening Night Before
Christmas* by Thomas
Sainsbury, Kura Forrester,
Brynley Stent and
Byron Coll
7 – 22 Dec 2016

*Parker and Sainsbury
D.O.C.ing* by Chris Parker
and Thomas Sainsbury
28 Apr – 6 May 2017

Like Sex by Nathan Joe
Exposed Theatre
25 May – 3 Jun 2017

Jingles – The Musical
by Dean Hewison
Out of Bounds
6 – 17 Jun 2017

Power Ballad
by Julia Croft
Zanetti Productions
6 – 17 Jun 2017

I Ain't Mad at Cha
by Turene Jones
Waiti Productions
20 – 24 Jun 2017

Looking at Stuff in Clouds
by Donna Brookbanks
and Shoshana McCallum
Playfight Productions
25 Jul – 5 Aug 2017

Te Pou Theatre

Lost Girls
by Patrick Graham
Theatrewhack
28 Sep – 1 Oct 2016

Sham by Jess Sayer
1 – 4 Sep 2016

The Snot Gobbler
by Nicci Reuben and
Ross Goffin
Chocolate Lantern
Theatre Company and
Navi Collaborative
19 Apr – 22 Mar 2017

*Elephants/Welfare/Duty –
The Musical*
by Alan Williamson
Elephant Duty Productions
8 – 11 Mar 2017

*Ngā Maunga Kohu –
The Misty Mountains*
by Tainui Tukiwaho and
Briar Collard
Te Rēhia Theatre
11 – 15 Jul 2017

Q Theatre

Camping
by Chris Parker and
Thomas Sainsbury
Auckland Pride Festival
8 – 16 Feb 2017

*Impostar – Who Does
He Think He Is?*
by Jason Chasland and
Lyndee-Jane Rutherford
NZ Pride Festival
11 – 18 Feb 2017

Legacy Project Four:
Callum in the Aftermath
by Prior McRea; *Coming
Out Night* by Ryan McKee;
Daddy Issues by Pedro
Diegues; *Eternity* by David
Blakey; *First Love* by Aatir
Zaidi; *Two Lovers Sit on
a Park Bench Holding
Hands in the Moonlight* by
Hannah Owen Wright
Auckland Pride Festival
14 – 18 Feb 2017

Jane Doe
by Eleanor Bishop
Zanetti Productions
6 – 17 Jun 2017

My Best Dead Friend
by Anya Tate-Manning
Zanetti Productions
12 – 22 Jul 2017

Chance to Ignite
by Massive Nui Ensemble
Company
25 – 29 Jul 2017

*The Mooncake and
the Kumara*
by Mei-Lin Te Puea Hansen
Oryza Foundation
and Betsy & Mana
Productions
28 Jun – 8 Jul 2017

Leilani
by Mahuika Theatre
Company
4 – 13 Aug 2016

Auckland Live

Call of the Sparrows
by Chye-Ling Huang
Proudly Asian Theatre
12 – 16 Oct 2016

The Beautiful Ones
by Hone Kouka
Tawata Productions
19 – 26 Nov 2016

*Spirit House –
A Ghost Story*
by Carl Bland
Nightson and
Theatre Stampede
16 Feb – 5 Mar 2017

*MAMIL: Middle Aged
Man in Lycra*
by Gregory Cooper
Bruce Mason Centre
9 – 10 Jun 2017

Te Puihi
by Cian Elyse Waiti
Waiti Productions
13 – 17 Jun 2017

The Pumphouse

The Pink Hammer
by Michele Amas
Tadpole Productions
13 – 23 Oct 2016

The Santa Claus Show
by Tim Bray, music and
lyrics by Christine White
Tim Bray Productions
5 – 22 Dec 2016

Remain in Light
by Stephen Sinclair
Click-Clack Productions
25 Feb – 4 Mar 2017

Puff the Magic Dragon
by Tim Bray, based on the
song by Leonard Lupton
and Peter Yarrow

Tim Bray Productions
8 – 29 Apr 2017

Nigel by Kate McDermott
Sapphire Theatre
Company
23 – 27 May 2017

*The Great Piratical
Rumbustification*
by Margaret Mahy
adapted by Tim Bray
Tim Bray Productions
1 – 22 Jul 2017

Mangere Arts Centre

Wild Dogs Under my Skin
by Tusiata Avia, FCC
Mangere Arts Centre
26 Sep – 1 Oct 2016

Magdalena of Mangere
by Louise Tu'u
We Should Practice
29 Mar – 1 Apr 2017

Mirror Mirror
by Alison Quigan, Troy
Tu'ua and the company
Mangere Arts Centre
21 – 29 Apr 2017

In Transit
by Wanjiku Kiarie
Sanderson
Tala Pasifika African
Connection
Mangere Arts Centre
4 – 13 May 2017

Other Venues Auckland

Schlunted
by Adam Spedding
composition
by Brayden Jeffrey
The Other People
TAPAC, 2 – 5 Nov 2016,
15 – 25 Mar 2017

The Bone Feeder Libretto
by Renee Liang,
Score by Gareth Farr
Auckland Arts Festival
ASB Waterfront Theatre
23 – 26 Mar 2017

*Swabhoomi:
Borrowed Earth*
by Ahilan Karunaharan
and Prayas Theatre
Company, TAPAC
25 May – 4 Jun 2017

Heaven and Earth – Rangī and Papa by Midge Perez
Hawkins Theatre
26 – 27 Jun 2017

Auckland Fringe Festival 21 Feb – 12 Mar 2017

The Black Orchid by Anjula Prakash; *Dead Boys are Blue* by Dido St. Claire; *Enter the New World* by Binge Culture; *The Epidemical Existence of a Personal Malfunxion at the Age of Twenty Something* by Georgina Silk, James Wenley, Chye-Ling Huang, Andrew Gunn, Katie Burson, Mikaela Rüegg and Natasha Daniel; *Flesh of the Gods* by Andrew Gunn; *Infectious* by Jason Smith and Thomas Sainsbury; *Jane Doe* by Eleanor Bishop; *The Last Man on Earth is Trapped in a Supermarket* by Ben Anderson; *Moonbridge* by Culture Clash; *Once there was a Woman* by Beth Kayes; *Pardon Me, Alan Turing* by Stephen Lunt; *Power Ballad* by Julia Croft; *Prodigal Son the Musical* by Hun Bin Lee; *Snowflake* by Jayran Mansouri; and *When the World was Wide* by Billie Staples

PALMERSTON NORTH

Centrepoint and Dark Room

Bare by Toa Fraser
Simple Truth Theatre
10 – 12 Aug 2016

Loose – A Private History of Booze & Iggy Pop 1996-2015 by Jonny Potts
3 – 5 Nov 2016

The Streaker by Gregory Cooper
4 Nov – 17 Dec 2016

WELLINGTON

Circa

No Post on Sunday devised by the Company
Everybody Cool Lives Here
27 Aug – 10 Sep 2016

Last Legs by Roger Hall
10 Sep – 8 Oct 2016,
27 Jan – 19 Feb 2017

Central by Dave Armstrong
15 Oct – 12 Nov 2016

Jack and the Beanstalk by Roger Hall, Lyrics by Paul Jenden, music by Michael Nicholas Williams
19 Nov 2016 – 11 Jan 2017

Scarlet and Gold by Lorae Parry
24 Nov – 22 Dec 2016

Weed by Anthony McCarten
30 Jun – 29 Jul 2017

Destination Beehive by Lorae Parry and Pinky Agnew
7 Jul – 5 Aug 2017

BATS

Well by Zoe Joblin
Women Aren't Wolves Productions
16 – 20 Aug 2016

The Next Best Thing by Chaz Harris
Seriously Entertainment
1 – 10 Sep 2016

The Grass is Meaner by Edward Campbell
A Short Scot Cooperative
13 – 24 Sep 2016

The Fence by Fran Olds
The Brothers and Sisters Collective
15 – 24 Sep 2016

Hold Me by Emily Duncan
Prospect Park Productions
6 – 10 Sep 2016

Shaken by Emily Duncan
Prospect Park

Productions
Short n Sweet
19 – 22 Oct 2016

Fred is Cold by Ben Wilson
25 – 29 Oct 2016

A Kete of Cooked Kumara by Ralph Johnson
Baggage
1 – 5 Nov 2016

Three Wise Blackmen by Tony Hopkins
Baggage
1 – 5 Nov 2016

The Rime of the Modern Mariner by Nick Hayes adapted by The Playground Collective
10 – 26 Nov 2016

Wine Lips by Sam Brooks
Making Friends Collective
29 Nov – 10 Dec 2016

Stand Up Love by Gavin McGibbon
Making Friends Collective
29 Nov – 10 Dec 2016

Billy and the Curse of the Falling Limbs by Icicle Productions
6 – 10 Dec 2016

Smells like Xmas by Binge Culture
13 – 17 Dec 2016

Raggedy-Anne and Mr Piths by Ella Hope-Higginson
1 – 4 Feb 2017

The Better Best Possible Album Party that Anybody Has Ever Been Two by Kate McGill and Frith Horan, Alacrity Productions
13 – 17 Dec 2016

These are a few of my Favourite Sings by Francesca Emms
Wanderlust Productions
14 – 17 Dec 2016

PSA Election Day by Thom Adams and

James Nokise
No Fefe Collective
16 – 20 May 2017

The Basement Tapes by Stella Reid
30 May – 3 Jun 2017

Young and Hungry: *One Night Only* by Finnius Teppet; *Fallen Angels* by Emily Duncan; *Attila the Hun* by Abby Howells
14 – 29 Jul 2017

Other Venues Wellington

Emperor's New Clothes by Guy Langford
Kidzstuff Theatre for Children
Tararua Tramping Club
24 Sep – 4 Oct 2016

The Emperor's Nightingale by Hans Christian Andersen adapted by Rhonda Edwards
Bluebird Theatre
Coasters Theatre
Paraparaumu
7 – 8 Oct 2016

It's a Trial by Binge Culture and Barbarian
Wellington Museum
19 Nov 2016

Galathea – Into The Bush by John Lyly adapted by Ania Upstill
Public Trust Building
23 Nov – 3 Dec 2016

The Undertow: The Ragged, Dog and Bone, Public Works, The Landeaters by Helen Pearse-Otene
Te Rākau Theatre
Te Papa Tongarewa
18 – 29 Jan 2017

The Queen of Tarts by Paul Percy and Michael Vinten
Bacchus Theatre Trust
Whitireia Theatre
1 – 5 Feb 2017

The Whale Rider by Witi Ihimaera, adapted for the stage by Tim Bray

Tim Bray Productions
Capital E National
Theatre Festival
13 – 18 Mar 2017

*The Three Lil' Pigs
Wild Adventure*
by Rob Ormsby
Kidzstuff Theatre
Taranua Tramping Club
15 – 29 Apr 2017

An Awfully Big Adventure
by Capital E
Capital E National
Theatre for Children
Te Papa Tongarewa
23 – 25 Apr 2017

Ellie and the Star
by Simon McArthur
Kapitall Kids' Theatre
Gryphon Theatre
11 – 22 Jul 2017

The Little Duckling
by Guy Langford
Kidzstuff Theatre
for Children
Taranua Tramping Club
8 – 22 Jul 2017

NZ Fringe Festival 10 Feb – 4 Mar 2017

*26 Cats Destroy the
Patriarchy* by Henrietta
Bollinger; *Alayne's Cat
Safari* by Making Friends
Collective; *The Basement
Tapes* by Stella Reid;
Belle on a Bike by Tanya
Batt; *Biased Beyond
Belief* by Evangelina
Telfar; *The Boundary
Riders* by Rachel Dawick;
Colour Me, Nostalgia!
by Freaks of Nature;
DILF by Ben Powdrell;
Fouvale Imperium by
James Nokise; *Flo* by
Will Harris, Amanda
Baker, Gina Moss and
Richard Chapman;
How I Met my Father by
Rhian Hill; *Jacob's After
Party* by Jake Brown;
Jacob's Party by Jake
Brown; *The Lola Show*
by Ian Harman; *Maggot*
by Angela Fouhy, Elle
Wootton and Freya Finch;
The Man by Benjamin

Crellin; *Nan and Tuna*
by Anna Bailey; *Out of
Darkness* by Just Be
Productions; *Paying for It:
An Insider's Guide to the
NZ Sex Industry*; *Router
Sidewalker Pedestrian
Pilgrimage* by George
Fenn; *Slow Lane* by Bing
Culture; *Stoge Chollonge*
2006 by the 2006 Stoge
Chollonge Committee
Team; *Super Clean* by
Rumpus Room; *Troll* by
Ralph McCubbin Howell;
*Wahine Mawhero: Pink
Māori Woman* by Lee
Ray; and *The Wirecutters*
by Wellington Young
Actors and Churton Park
Young Actors

Kia Mau Festival 2 – 24 June 2017

*Fire in the Water, Fire
in the Sky* by Miria
George; *Friday's Flock*
by Reihana Haronga;
*The Mooncake and the
Kumara* by Mei-Lin Te
Puea Hansen; *Portrait of
An Artist Mongrel: The
Writings of Rowley Habib
1933 – 2016* by Hāpai
Productions; *The Purple
Onion* by Tupe Lualua;
Riverside Kings by
Natano Keni and Sarita
So; and *This is What it
Looks Like* by Neenah
Dekkers-Reihana

OTHER NORTH ISLAND

Mahara
by Kristyl Necho and Puti
Lancaster
Hawkes Bay Arts Festival
12 – 13 Oct 2016

Edge of a Raindrop
by Pereri King, Puti
Lancaster, Marama
Beamish, Janis Cheng
and Moana Munro
Hawkes Bay Arts Festival
14 – 16 Oct 2016

Friday's Flock
by Reihana Haronga
Te Puanga Whakaari
Productions

Saleyards Café,
Fielding
17 – 26 Nov 2016,
18 – 20 Jan 2017,
26 – 29 Apr 2017

Meteor Theatre, Hamilton

One Hill of a Fight
by Michael Switzer
19 – 27 May 2017

Thursdays Child
by Benny Marama
21 – 24 Jun 2017

*The Wonderful
Wizard of Tron*
by Benny Marama and
Jeremy Mayall
11 – 15 Jul 2017

CHRISTCHURCH

The Court Theatre

Waiora: Te-u-kai-po
by Hone Kouka
13 Aug – 3 Sep 2016

The Streaker
by Gregory Cooper
17 Sep – 22 Oct 2016

Puss in Boots
by Georgia-Kate Heard
28 Sep – 8 Oct 2016

A Christmas Carol
by Dan Bain
30 Nov – 17 Dec 2016

Lysistrata
adapted by Holly Chappell,
Tom Eason, Eden Cotter-
Longworth and the Court
Youth Company
8 – 10 Dec 2016

Jack and the Beanstalk
by Brendon Bennetts
18 – 28 Jan 2017

Robin Hood
by the company
1 – 19 Feb 2017

Ropable
by Ross Gumbley and
Allison Horsley
11 Feb – 4 Mar 2017

Cinderella in Space
by Kathleen Burns
19 – 29 Apr 2017

*Matatihi: Maia's
Journey of Bravery*
by Rutene Spooner
and Holly Chappell
Schools tour
29 May – 30 Jun 2017

*Hamlet: The Video Game
(The Stage Show)*
by Simon Peacock
3 – 24 Jun 2017

*Snow White and the
Seven Dwarfs*
by Brendon Bennetts
10 – 22 Jul 2017

Other Venues Christchurch

Oliver Twist by Charles
Dickens adapted
by Mike Friend
The Loons
Lyttelton Arts Factory
13 – 30 Dec 2016

Unforgotten
by Nataliya Oryshchuk
No Productions Theatre
Collective
Papa Hou
24 – 26 Feb 2017

Moby Dick
by Two Productions
Christchurch Arts Centre
18 – 21 Apr 2017

La'u Gagana
by Y Not
Rowley Ave School
2 – 3 June 2017

Empire Drive
by Two Productions
Papa Hou
3 June 2017

*The Brave Little Monster
Who Ran Away from
the Sea*
by Two Productions
NASDA Theatre
10 – 12 July 2017

Braggadocious
by The Playspace Theatre
Company
Christchurch Arts Centre
9 – 11 Jul 2017

Let's Not Argue
by Lizzie Tollemache and
David Ladderman

Rollicking Entertainment
Lyttelton Arts Factory
9 – 24 Jun 2017

DUNEDIN

Fortune Theatre

Tiny Deaths
by Uther Dean
Counterpoint
Productions
Fortune Theatre
7 – 9 Sep 2016

The Devil's Half-Acre
by Ralph McCubbin Howell
Trick of the Light Theatre
and Arts Festival Dunedin
1 – 4 Oct 2016

My Dad's Boy
by Finnius Teppett
11 Feb – 4 Mar 2017

Little Red Riding Hood
by Brendon Bennetts
22 – 29 Apr 2017

Last Legs by Roger Hall
29 Apr – 27 May 2017

What You Will
by Zac Nicholls
15 – 22 Jul 2017

Other Venues Dunedin

Caterpillars
by Thomas Monckton
and Kallo Collective
Arts Festival Dunedin
5 – 6 Oct 2016

Christ Almighty!
by Dan Musgrove and
Natalie Medlock
Counterpoint Productions
1 – 3 Dec 2016

*On The Conditions and
Possibilities of Hillary
Clinton Taking Me as Her
Young Lover* by Arthur
Meek and Geoff Pinfield
Arts Festival Dunedin
5 – 8 Oct 2016

Dunedin Fringe Festival 9 – 19 March 2017

*The Impossibly Possible
Unbelievably Believable
Journey and Return
of Josephine Clark* by
Barking Fish Theatre
Project; *Kokako's Song* by
Birdlife Productions; *My
Beloved Monster and Me*
by Anisha Hensley Wilson;
Queen by Sam Brooks;
Stories to Heal Violence
by Stopping Violence
Dunedin; and *Alive in
Berlin* by Jenny Powell

OTHER SOUTH ISLAND

The Measures Taken
by Paul Maunder
Kiwi/Possum Productions
and Waiata Koga
Greymouth, Hokitika,
Westport, Reefton
26 Aug – 17 Sep 2016

Helen and the Ferals
by Paul Maunder
Kiwi/Possum
Productions
Regent Theatre
Greymouth
20 – 22 Jul 2017

Losing Faith
by Liz Breslin
Wanaka
Edgewater Resort
21 Sep – Oct 1 2016

Nelson Fringe Festival 29 April – 7 May 2017

Alienate by Penny Taylor;
Hero Complex by Flash
As Productions; *Hidden*
by Cre8; *The Magnificent
Man in the Moon* by
Bridget Sanders; *Solitude*
by Martine Baanvinger
Waiting by Sos and Sha
Creative; The Visitor
by Cat House Films

NEW ZEALAND THEATRE MONTH

**CELEBRATING AND ELEVATING
NZ THEATRE**

SEPTEMBER 2018

Take part by
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that month.

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TRUMPETS!

Roger Hall announces New Zealand Theatre Month.



Dean Parker thought of it first. A New Zealand Theatre Month. Almost every other genre has its day, its week, its month. Time theatre did the same, in particular to celebrate New Zealand plays.

Three or so years ago, an informal committee was set up to get it started. But there were difficulties. We exited stage left.

Early this year I thought, “Bugger it I’ll do it.” I thought back to 1989. I’d been more than once to the NZ Festival in Wellington where the media fawned over the overseas writers and ignored the Kiwi ones. I set up a festival in Dunedin which included only New Zealand writers. Everyone has a writers’ festival these days, but then it was something new. So, this year I thought, if it could be done then, it can be done now.

The main aim: as many theatres throughout the country put on a NZ work during September 2018. It seems almost certain that all professional theatres in the main centres will take part and many community theatres are already committing. The second aim:

to get more people to go the theatre.

Of course, we hope that schools and drama courses will join in too. We’re hoping there will be a lot of activities in addition to actual productions. Maybe we could celebrate the skills of those who work behind the scenes and who hardly ever get enough recognition: the designers, stage managers and operators. Libraries will be putting on displays, and it would be nice to see some input from our museums. A chance to celebrate our history and our theatre heroes.

We have a year to go. Theatre in New Zealand has never been so strong. The amount of work produced and the number of venues have never been so high. But the vast majority of people have no idea what is happening. We want to change that.

Our motto: “Do not ask what NZ Theatre Month can do for us; ask what you can do for NZTM.” Please join us.

ABOVE: *Attila the Hun* by Abby Howells, Young and Hungry, BATS. Image: Stephen A’Court.

PLAYMARKET INFORMATION

Playmarket issues and manages performance licenses and royalty payments, circulates clients' plays in New Zealand and internationally, advises on and negotiates commission, translation and collaboration agreements, and maintains an archive of playwrights' work.

Playmarket also offers advice to all New Zealand playwrights, theatremakers and producers, a raft of development resources such as clinics, readings, and events; and industry discourse, partnerships and networks. Our Bookshop provides every published New Zealand play in print and with a comprehensive catalogue of plays to download or purchase.

FACTS AND FIGURES

1 July 2016 – 30 June 2017

Professional performance licenses issued: 82

Community performance licenses issued: 97

International licenses issued: 23

School/Tertiary performance licenses issued: 122

Scripts circulated: 1577

Scripts/drafts received: 285

Paid Script assessments: 11

PUBLISHING 2017

NZ Play Series

Dawn Raids by Oscar Kightley

Series Editor: David O'Donnell |

Design: Cansino & Co | Editing and

Production: Whitireia Publishing

Performing Dramaturgy by Fiona Graham

Editor: David O'Donnell | Design: Cansino

& Co | Editing and Production: Whitireia

Publishing

Playmarket Annual

Editor: Mark Amery | Design: Cansino & Co |

Editorial assistants: Salesi Le'ota and

Murray Lynch

State of Our Stage

Stephen Bain, Alison Bruce, Jo Bunce,

Alice Canton, Tānemahuta Gray, Jonathon Hendry, Shelagh Magadza, Kate Prior, Victor Rodger, Jessica Smith, Brian Steele, Philip Tremewan and John Verryt

Editor: Mark Amery | Design: Cansino & Co |

Editorial assistants: Salesi Le'ota and

Murray Lynch

Playmarket Guidelines Series

Writing or Devising Collaboratively

Editor: Hilary Beaton | Design: Cansino & Co

eBulletin

Published monthly via email. News and opportunities for those interested in New Zealand plays | Editor: Salesi Le'ota

edBulletin

Sent to schools biannually, offering resources and opportunities to teachers | Editor: Salesi Le'ota

COMPETITIONS AND PROJECTS

Adam NZ Play Award Winner 2017:

Still Life with Chickens by D.F. Mamea

Runner-up: *Uneasy Dreams and Other*

Things by Lori Leigh

Best Play by a Māori Playwright:

Te Papakāinga by Maraea Rakuraku

Best Play by a Pasifika Playwright:

Still Life with Chickens by D.F. Mamea



Highly Commended: *Burn Her* by Sam Brooks

Bruce Mason Award Winner 2016:

Sam Brooks

Playwrights b4 25 Winner 2017: *Cannibal*
by Finnius Teppet

Highly Commended: *72 Cambridge Tce*
by Courtney Rose Brown, *The Sunshine*
Airport Hotel by Frances Chin, *If I Love You*
by Kieran Craft

Playmarket Plays for the Young

Competition 2016: *The Tiny Man* by
Elle Wootton (3 – 8 year olds), *The*
Adventures of Tom Sawyer and *Could Do*
Better by Mike Hudson (8 – 12 year olds)
Esther by Angie Farrow (teenagers)

Highly Commended: *Bloody Hell Jesus*
(*Get Your Own Friends*) by Lucy Craig and
Lovin' It! by Jo Randerson

Brown Ink Development Programme 2016:
I Ain't Mad At Cha by Turene Jones and *Still*
Life with Chickens by D.F. Mamea

Asian Ink Development Programme 2016:
Orientation by Chye-Ling Huang

Rebecca Mason Executive Coaching:
Geoff Pinfield, Emily Duncan and Holly Gooch

Playwrights in Schools programme
in partnership with NZ Book Council:

Dave Armstrong, Michelanne Forster,
Alex Lodge, Arthur Meek and Ella West

Young and Hungry Playwrights' Initiative

2017: *One Night Only* by Finnius Teppet,
Fallen Angels by Emily Duncan, and *Attila*
the Hun by Abby Howells

Robert Lord Cottage Residencies:

Hannah Bulloch, Mere Whaanga, Lynn
Jenner, Elspeth Sandys, Riemke Ensing
and Annabel Wilson

CLINICS, READINGS AND WORKSHOPS

1 July 2016 – 30 June 2017: *Hearts of Men*
by Albert Mateni, *12th Round* by Suli Moa,
The Road That Wasn't There by Ralph
McCubbin-Howell, *Peter Pan* by
Lorae Parry and Pinky Agnew, *Soft N Hard*
by Jo Randerson and Thomas LaHood, *Uma*
Lava by Victor Rodger, *One Perfect Moment*
by Ellie Smith, *Magdalena of Mangere* by
Louise Tu'u, *The Legacy Project 4*, PANZ
Short Plays: *A Much Bigger Story* by June
Allen, *Between the Aisles* by Robert Gilbert,
and *New Zealander* by Marc Shaw.

Playmarket Playfellows 2017:

The Wallace Foundation, Ruth Graham

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Playmarket thanks our partners for their support:

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Four Winds Foundation; Hilary Beaton;
Infinity Foundation; Massive Company;
Musical Theatre New Zealand; Nathan
Foster Memorial Trust; NZ Book Council;
NZ Festival: Writers Week; NZ Players
Theatre Trust; NZ Writers Guild; Playwrights
Guild of Canada; Playwrights' Studio
Scotland; Playwriting Australia; TAPAC;
Tawata Productions; The Actors' Program;
The Writers' Cottage Trust; Te Whaea:
National Dance & Drama Centre; Theatre
New Zealand; Underwood Family; Whitireia
Publishing; Young and Hungry Arts Trust and
all of the professional theatre companies.

PREVIOUS PAGE: *One Night Only* by Finnius Teppett,
Young and Hungry, BATS. Image: Stephen A'Court.



Drama
NEW ZEALAND

mahi whakaari
o Aotearoa

**Drama NZ: the New Zealand Association
for Drama in Education.**

Who is Drama NZ?
Drama New Zealand is the national body that represents
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academics, applied theatre workers and theatre in education
practitioners at national and international forums as well as
providing a voice in education policy-making.

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Create, Educate, Communicate

THE LAST WORD

Louise Tu'u asks who is covering for whom.

Location is a starting point for all of my work, including my recent play, *Magdalena of Mangere*, which was rehearsed in Mangere East and Manukau and performed at Mangere Arts Centre (MAC).

It was one of the most difficult and sprawling works I had ever conceived. I had three main ambitions: to engage with being a woman of colour but not reduce the play to facile identity politics, to involve other communities such as Muslim women but not exploit their faith and multiplicity of being, and finally, to make a kick-arse performance work in a space that was Pasifika at MAC but not another infantilising fairytale of Brüder Grimm or a physical theatre work using Pasifika bodies, overlaid with well-worn clichés from Katherine Mansfield. I managed to achieve all three ambitions, paying all fixed costs, cast and crew on a budget of vagueness, hot air and faith.

Magdalena of Mangere opened with the sole usher welcoming audience members and asking whether or not they were claustrophobic. Most heads roared back with a knowing laugh, inferring they were experienced theatregoers, knowing that there was something to be aimed for. Would the work backfire or succeed? In every scene? By the end of the show? Other heads remained attentive, indifferent, even contemplative.

Throughout the show, Peau Halapua and Linda Filimoehala, two professional classical musicians played live music in the space, both Pasifika women, dressed in white.

I invited the Electoral Commission to be involved in *Magdalena of Mangere*. We staged a live interview in the play with the fantastic Registrar of Electors Georgia Tatana. We also encouraged audiences to ask questions. Georgia came to rehearsals and performances, holding her own stall before and after performances.

My aim was to involve a Mangere-based audience, yet I saw repeated the theatre reality of having patrons mostly from Grey Lynn and Ponsonby. It was an omen I tried to ignore about voter participation as well. The large heterogeneous masses of underpaid working citizens, perhaps too tired to register to vote, were also under-represented for our season. Decisions were made by more affluent and less harried citizens.

In the middle of the show, there was a two-hander. The question “But am I in the right place?” volleyed between the two in varying tones of annoyance, alarm and alacrity. This is a question I have asked several times of my practice and of myself in relation to ‘Pacificness’ – its legibility, legitimacy and legacy.

In my sixteen years of being a professional actor and fourteen years as a playwright I have been the first to represent New Zealand at the Royal Court Theatre, the first to represent Samoa at the World Indigenous Theatre Reading Series in New York, and the first jury member from Oceania to adjudicate at the Zürcher Theater Spektakel in Switzerland. Yet it is only when I am in Niu Sila that I become aware that these mean nothing. The space of privilege, entitlement and acknowledgment in theatre here comes to those who are popular, easy to get on with, and radical – but only when that seems to be similarly radical to the Pakeha theatre mother capitals of London or Edinburgh.

Recently I experienced an event that made me question (again) my own supposed community: that of the Pacific. This May I had an earlier play of mine plagiarised. The dramaturg of the ‘new’ work is a senior Pacific playwright. I state this openly because it is the silence around these events that allow them to continue in silence. I state this because while the act of plagiarism is not original in itself, it was rather annoying because if I was a male Pacific playwright, the playwright and dramaturg involved (both Pacific men) would probably have come up to me beforehand and asked me to be involved.

My observation of the Pasifika community is that space is made for male achievements. They are more readily accepted and celebrated than us tamaita’i. I am thankful for being a member of the New Zealand Writers Guild. I recommend that you follow Executive Director Alice Shearman’s advice on copyright: join the Guild, register all of your works each for a small fee and get all agreements you need related to the use of the work in question on paper.

The final scene of *Magdalena of Mangere* had a white veil completely cover the audience. In all of my drafts, it was the one image I refused to let go of and the one I refused to tell anyone about. Playmarket funded a



BUT AM I IN THE RIGHT PLACE?

devising workshop, which I am very grateful for. Dramaturg Charles Koroneho helped push me into actually writing it down as part of the play. Designer Owen McCarthy enabled me to continue playing with how we could actually get this idea off the ground and on top of people heads. Dominion Law lawyer Tim Riley gave us pro bono advice about how I could avoid getting sued (if someone is injured or dies, due to the veil falling on them) and still pull it off.

The results were spectacular and unforgettable, with a veil floating down from the rafters, slowly draping over the audience twice. Long after the show, I read this act to symbolise spaces I encompass in my work and whom is covering for whom.

ABOVE: *Magdalena of Mangere* by Louise Tu’u, We Should Practice. Image: Andy Fang.



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