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No 56
WINTER 2021

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REASSESSMENT

ISSUE No 56

During re-assessment after the challenges of 2020, Playmarket took the opportunity to make some adjustments. Among these was the decision to realign the *Playmarket Annual* to a calendar year and to publish it three months earlier. Apart from improving our internal schedule and reducing the amount of work involved in collating both the performance calendar and our own statistics, we think this will make the *Annual* more immediate to the reader and easier for future research.

This issue is packed with discussion on community theatres' current relationship with staging Aotearoa plays; what it is like to be a professional practitioner working in theatre in the regions outside of Tāmaki Makaurau, Te Whanganui-a-Tara

and Ōtautahi; the presence of local plays in our schools, and how this has changed over time (revealed in a wonderful reminiscence from one of our oldest practitioners); innovations in online accessibility from Māori theatre companies; a look back at some of our forgotten plays from the past and why they are still worth considering; and advice on archiving our present theatre activity for future generations. All this with round-ups of the year in four major centres.

My thanks to the editorial expertise of Mark Amery, and trusty assistant editor Salesi Le'ota, for what is another wonderful and extremely informative publication.

Murray Lynch
Director/Tumuaki, Playmarket



PLAYMARKET ANNUAL

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COVER IMAGE: Alex Lodge, Benny Marama and
Melisa Martin in Kirikiriroa in front of Michael
Parekowhai's sculpture 'Tongue of the Dog'.
Image: Mark Hamilton Photographer.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Opening night curtain call of
Cinderella by Gregory Cooper, GMG Productions,
Isaac Theatre Royal. Image: The Heather and
Doug Records.



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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *Basement Variety Hour* by Lizzie Tollemache, Centrepunt Basement Company. Image: Sam Millen. *Our Modern Earth (Is a F*cking Mess)* by Shift, Basement Theatre. Image: Yoon-Young Milla Lee Photography. NZ Sign Language interpreter Kelly Hodgins with *Greedy Cat* by Tim Bray, adapted from the books by Joy Cowley and Robyn Benton, Tim Bray Theatre Company. Image: David Rowland. *Princess Boy Wonder* by George Fowler, A Mulled Whine, BATs. Image: Roc+ Photography. *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt* by Tusiata Avia, FCC, Soho Playhouse, New York City, USA. Image: Adam Kissick.

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A Lion in the Meadow and Other Stories by Margaret Mahy (2021)

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Why I read the play I read

APIRANA TAYLOR

on Te Raukura: The Feathers of the Albatross

This play by Harry Dansey from the early 1970s was written to smash down locked doors. That is what it did and continues to do.

A deeper level of understanding of *Te Raukura* is gained when the time it was written in and written about are understood.

“This play is many things to me,” said Dansey, “but above all it is a tribute to my wife’s people from whom I gained many of the facts and all of the spirit of the times in which the play is set.”

The play is set in the times of the Taranaki land wars in the 1860s and the ensuing resistance to land confiscation. It is epic in its scope and its aims. It attempts to cover hitherto little-covered historical territory. We are taken to battle grounds, marae, Hauhau ceremonies, Parihaka and The House of Representatives amongst other places, as part of a guided tour through events of the era the drama is set.

Historical figures Te Whiti, Grey, Te Ua Haumēne, Bryce, Fox, and others come and go throughout the two acts arguing over the issues confronting them and taking action over the conflicts they are caught in.

Te Raukura was first performed in 1972 and published in 1974. This was a time

of increasing discontent for Māori with the justice system and the disempowerment of Māori by central Government. This combined with grievances over Māori land loss, colonial hypocrisy, loss of cultural identity, misrepresentation and economic difficulties led to many Māori marching in protest, seeking to express this politically as well as through literature, music, visual and performing arts.

Theatre, it can be argued, was one of the slower bastions to open its doors – or, more truthfully to have its doors smashed down by would-be Māori theatre practitioners, wishing to tell Māori stories written by Māori with our unique voice.

Out of this matrix-like maelstrom, Dansey’s play was born.

There is a sincere commitment by the playwright to take the audience on a guided tour through history, as a lesson to help rectify the misrepresentation of Māori people and resistance to land loss, which is part of the play’s point.

Occasionally this feels a little didactic, but it must be understood many in Māoridom in this era were knocking on locked doors, desperate to be heard, to portray and redress

past wrongs and to make people aware of injustices with an urgency that drove us to cry out as best we could, with the knowledge we had of this new world of theatre at the time.

Two recurrent figures, Koroheke and Tamatane act as narrators throughout the play. Some playwrights use this technique, but in this play it occasionally feels as if the narration is highly instructional, like a teacher pointing at the blackboard, telling us what is happening and what to think. The play could have been more powerful, in parts, if the drama and conflict was portrayed only within the play, leaving the audience to think and reach its own conclusions. This tendency towards didacticism is partly offset through discussions the narrators have between scenes about events within the play.

At times the English language used feels archaic, as if the writer is trying to emulate Shakespeare in style – which many developing writers often do unconsciously and seldom do well. However, there is a tradition in much Māori oral poetry to be formal and classical in style which, understandably, the writer strives to recreate in English. Consequently Dansey has written some wonderful poetry within the play, such as the prologue at the beginning of Act Two.

‘Taranaki, and the broken tribes

Huddle for comfort round your sacred slopes

But comfort there is none for such as they

In ridge or rock nor chill impersonal snow,

Gone is their mana from the ancient lands;

The settler waits impatient close behind

The armed patrols which canter down the trails

That cross the plains from mountains to the sea

And plan the roads, the survey lines, the forts

To serve and mark and hold the looted earth.’

Much of what the play was written about is relevant today and will be relevant tomorrow, shining like a torch on aspects of our country’s past and its consequences.



KNOCKING ON LOCKED DOORS, DESPERATE TO BE HEARD

Within the currents swirling about beneath the surface of the play are disturbing conflicts, hidden injustices and truths that can lead one to consider man’s inhumanity and, like Te Whiti, seek a better way. This adds resounding power to the work and a lasting relevance.

As an early play at the threshold of what was to be a major breakthrough of trained Māori theatre practitioners producing, writing, acting and directing Māori theatre with our own voice, *Te Raukura*, takes its place as one of the important and honoured cornerstones of Te Whare Tapere Māori.

ABOVE: George Henare and company in *Te Raukura: The Feathers of the Albatross* by Harry Dansey, Auckland Arts Festival, St Mary’s Cathedral, 1972. Image: Courtesy NZ Herald archive.



TĀMAKI MAKĀURAU 2020

BY IRENE CORBETT

The year of Covid-19. The year that New Zealand theatres closed their curtains, tickets lay unclipped, and programmes never made it to printing. For Tāmaki Makāurau, Auckland, 19 weeks and five days of tsunami-like lockdowns and restrictions on gatherings threatened to wash the theatre community away.

Auckland Pride and the Auckland Fringe were fortunate enough to scrape through before the March 19 measures but Auckland Arts Festival was not so lucky. Scouring the websites *Theatreview* and *Theatre Scenes* reveals only one review took place in April, no reviews were published in May, two in June, none again in July, and one review was produced in August. As illustrated by those five empty months, numerous shows did not make it in front of an audience. For many, 2020 was a year of disappointment, grief, and even despair. Amidst the calendar carnage, some shows and festivals were able to pivot to online platforms. Stray Theatre Co, the University of Auckland's Theatre Club, took their annual short play festival *Stir Fried XII* to Zoom in May, and Te Pou held the Kōanga Festival online in September offering a range of performances, readings, radio plays, and online gatherings.

Other productions were crafted especially for an online experience with Auckland Theatre Company presenting Chekhov's *The Seagull* in a series of instalments over Zoom and garnering considerable international attention, as well as Ibsen's *The Master Builder*. These digitally accessible productions were limelight in the otherwise dark winter of 2020.

Burning even brighter was Te Pou's Front Yard Festival. The May/June festival took short performances featuring music and physical theatre to the front lawns, driveways, and berms of Auckland's elderly. The festival creatively embraced the level 2 restrictions and offered a safe solution to the problems of isolation and loneliness. The directors, Tainui Tukiwaho and Jarod Rawiri, know that live theatre (even socially distanced theatre) possesses an extraordinary power for creating community, bringing joy, and instilling hope.

Shortly after this success, Auckland was flung back into lockdown which then eased to a new level 2.5. Amid these restrictions a few productions managed to meet social distancing requirements. ATC undertook a programme entitled Back On the Boards which included a new offering from young playwrights titled *48 Nights on Hope Street* penned in response to Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (as well as returns of *Black Lover* and *Still Life with Chickens*). *48 Nights on Hope Street* delivered an uncanny echo of Boccaccio's work as once again a group of young people told stories to entertain themselves while a pandemic ravaged around them. Happily the new material pushed beyond lockdown musings and into revealing studies of human nature. It remains to be seen, however, if our stages will become overpopulated with works reflecting on those strange lonely months or whether fresh concerns will drown out these inevitable Beckettian explorations of isolation.

September pulled in many directions with the Basement Reunited programme featuring



THEATRE CAN BE FOUND WHEREVER TWO PEOPLE MEET



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
LEFT: Filming *The Master
Builder* a new version by
Colin McColl, Auckland
Theatre Company.
Image: Andrew Malmo.

*Paradise or the Impermanence
of Ice Cream* by Jacob Rajan
and Justin Lewis, Indian Ink
Theatre Company, TAPAC.
Image: Ankita Singh.

Upu curated by Grace Taylor,
Silo Theatre and Auckland Arts
Festival, Q Theatre. Image:
Andi Crown Photography.

Back to Square One? by Anders
Falstie-Jensen, The Rebel
Alliance. Image: Sün + Müller.

*Over My Dead Body: Little
Black Bitch* by Jason Te Mete,
Tuatara Collective, TAPAC.
Image: 2113 Creatives.

This Fragile Planet, The New
Zealand Dance Company and
The Conch, Auckland Live.
Image: John McDermott.

ABOVE: *48 Nights on Hope
Street* by Freya Daly Sadgrove,
Leki Jackson-Bourke, Nathan
Joe, Ana Scotney and Cian
Elyse White, Auckland Theatre
Company, ASB Waterfront
Theatre. Image: Andi Crown
Photography.

PREVIOUS PAGE: *Le Basement
XXXmas Cabaret* by Kura
Forrester and Hayley Sproull,
Basement Theatre. Image:
Andi Crown Photography.

two shows focused on climate change (Amber Liberté's *Our Modern Earth (Is A F*cking Mess)*) and Grace Augustine's *Heatwave*). In October Prayas brought eight play extracts together to form the moving and provocative show *Yātrā*, marking the company's 15th anniversary.

In November Silo Theatre overcame considerable Covid related obstacles to present *Every Brilliant Thing*, an honest and yet heart-warming look at depression and suicide. Even the Basement's riotously funny Christmas show *Le Basement XXXmas Cabaret* barely mentioned Covid, focusing instead on the very real issue of keeping venues open. The sense of relief pervading the audiences attending these performances may have kickstarted the silly season, with theatre devotees giddy and abundantly thankful to be rubbing shoulders with strangers.

An unforeseen casualty of 2020 was the Auckland CBD. Already disrupted by endless construction and roadworks, the rise in working-from-home has put a sizable dent in the pool of possible patrons. As the city changes, Auckland's theatre community will have to work harder than ever to entice people from their heat-pumped homes and onto public transport for mid-week opening nights.

It will seem a daunting task to stage a show in Auckland with the threat of alert level changes always hanging overhead, but we must continue. As necessary as the online efforts were, it is the power of live theatre, arising from watching and being watched, that differentiates theatre from film. The reciprocal relationship of empathy and imagination simply cannot be replicated in recording. Our city needs theatre to reflect, to heal, to conjure new futures – but most of all, so we can band together as we face enormous local and global change.

So continue Auckland – kia kaha, kia maia, kia manawanui. If you can't tread the boards, take your shows outside and into the streets, and if you can't do that, take them online and into our homes. Theatre can be found wherever two people meet.

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GIVING STORIES COMMUNITY

*Alison Mudford on the state of the play in
Aotearoa's community theatres.*

An old man sits dejectedly in his favourite chair. "I don't want to go," Ken Taylor says, his voice cracking with emotion. His words are met with an awkward silence. Eventually, he struggles to his feet. Using his chair for support, he entwines his fingers through a crochet rug folded on the back. It's as if he expects this will somehow stop his family dragging him off to see out his days in a Dunedin rest home, far from his beloved Central Otago farm of 50 years. "Don't make me go," he pleads...

There are tears and sniffles in the audience. Hands wipe away telltale traces. Gary Henderson's *Home Land* has landed a powerful punch at East Auckland's Howick Little Theatre, where they find it's New Zealand stories such as this that have the strongest impact. Audiences recognise the situations, the characters and the emotions playing out on stage. They're seeing themselves, their friends, their families – their stories.

But Bryan Aitken, the President of Theatre New Zealand, which represents community theatre societies throughout Aotearoa among

its activities, says community groups aren't staging enough of these stories, and this needs to change.

"Traditionally, the people doing community-theatre play selection are looking for well-made English plays. If the executives are in their seventies, for example, then the play choices tend to reflect their tastes and interests rather than those of new audiences," says Bryan, a former Associate Artistic Director and original company member of Christchurch's Court Theatre, who now works as a freelance director, tutor and tour manager.

"This has to change at grassroots level. We have to get people to read more plays, ask questions about what's new and what's happening and see more theatre by going to their professional or community theatres. How will our theatres grow and develop if those who choose the plays for community theatres don't challenge themselves by seeing new work?"

Aitken acknowledges that a problem community theatres face is that they're not funded to take risks, even though, in most



cases, they are not paying wages. But, he adds, “People don’t know what they like until they taste it. If you don’t educate people about what’s new and interesting, then they won’t come, and you’ll stick with your Alan Ayckbourns, rather than reaching out and reflecting the community.”

“We’ve still got this thing of ‘I only go to theatre to be entertained.’ What you’re saying, then, is that you only want to laugh. I prefer to be engaged. It’s about education and it’s going to take a while for that to happen.”

But Aitken says it’s also about programme balancing and scheduling. “Try doing a surefire comedy, followed by a searing US drama, but do, say, two fewer nights of the drama. It’s about putting on the plays your community wants to see, but with a few ‘boiled sweets’ in between.

“There is a literary elitism with some of our senior practitioners, who are wanting to perform only established English and American playwrights. New Zealand stories need to be taught.”

In a normal year Bryan sees 30 to 40 productions performed by schools, community theatres and professional companies, which gives him a wide overview of plays being staged around the country. He says high school students, who are writing and devising works solely for the annual Theatrefest forum, are producing the most innovative work. These plays are seen at local and regional level and at national finals, but don’t get developed into full-length plays.

COMMUNITY THEATRES AREN’T STAGING ENOUGH OF THESE STORIES, AND THIS NEEDS TO CHANGE

ABOVE: Colin Olsen, Norman Maclean and Anker Dayberg packing in *The Motor Camp* by Dave Armstrong, Gisborne Unity Theatre, 2016. Image: Sarah Olsen.



THERE IS A GENTLE RENAISSANCE HAPPENING IN COMMUNITY THEATRE

“There’s a helluva lot more New Zealand theatre happening than some of our established bodies are aware of,” Bryan says. “But how do first-time playwrights get noticed? Does Playmarket, for example, need more funding to employ more people to read more scripts?”

On the positive side, Bryan says there is a gentle renaissance happening in community theatre, although he thinks it could take a decade.

“Increasingly, the groups are reflecting their community in staging stories from their own area. These plays are often written by a local person and reflect local history. We’re doing more and more of that now. A lot is quietly happening.”

One group with a long tradition of fostering and promoting this country’s playwrights, especially local writers, is Dunedin’s Globe Theatre, which celebrates its 60th anniversary this year. Its history goes back to James K. Baxter and Robert Lord, with 12 of Baxter’s plays written for production at the Globe. More recently, the group has staged works by Emily Duncan, Nigel Ensor and Keith Scott, with Scott’s *1917 Until the Day Dawns*, the story of three Central Otago men called up for World War I, winning Outstanding Original Script at the 2017 Dunedin Theatre Awards.

Bryan notes that community theatre standards are also steadily improving as more teaching occurs and actors and directors come to understand the nuances of individual scripts, and that all plays can’t be treated the same in terms of staging.

As well as predictable programming, he sees marketing as a problem. “Some community theatre websites and Facebook

ABOVE: *Good Grief* by Louise Proudfoot, Cas’n’ova Productions, Heaton Normal Intermediate Performing Arts Centre. Image: Craig Hutchison.

sites are dire.” With websites and social-media pages presenting a “shop window” to the public, theatres can’t afford to have out-of-date and poorly functioning online presences. “It’s about imagery and marketing, really communicating well with the wider community,” says Bryan. “Finding ways to reach your audience and also new audiences.”

He quotes former Court Theatre Artistic Director Elric Hooper, who said, “There is no one audience, there are audiences”, so successful marketing is about targeting the particular audience for the production being staged. “Part of the problem is us,” Bryan says. “We have to think differently.”

If, for example, a play is about teenage problems, theatres need to think about how to attract that particular audience. “You could, say, offer two tickets for \$20. Or a ‘pay what you can’ night. It’s about stimulating

THINK BEYOND THE SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO MAY ATTEND YOUR PREMIERE

young people, incentivising and offering an educative programme.”

Another change he says is cultural, a loosening up of conventions previously associated with theatre going, such as a requirement to dress up for a night at the theatre.

“Groups need to remove the barriers to people feeling comfortable about going to the theatre. It’s not like going to church.

For example, I delight in seeing a workman coming along to the theatre in his work clothes. That’s a cultural shift.”

Community theatres could also be commissioning new works, Bryan says.

DAVE ARMSTRONG IN TAIRĀWHITI

Something I find sad in New Zealand is that playwrights often work on a play for ages, only to have it performed once, to be never performed again. This doesn’t make for a sustainable career, and even happens to some festival plays and plays performed by big city theatres. For this reason, I always love it when I find that a school, or a small theatre in provincial New Zealand, wants to do one of my plays.

Some playwrights are superior about amateur performances of their work. But having your play performed by a school or amateur company doesn’t necessarily mean that it will be badly served. Their requirements are that a play is well-structured, has good parts for a variety of actors, and that their audience will enjoy it. Provincial audiences can be, though not always, more conservative than city ones. And although having a large cast can put off professional theatres, it’s usually a plus for amateurs.

I remember attending a performance of my play *The Motor Camp* in Gisborne. I was on holiday there and my wife booked our tickets under her maiden name in case the production was dreadful, and we wanted to escape unnoticed at halftime. We needn’t have worried. The actors were excellent, the direction assured, and the audience was great. We even got a review in the local paper the very next morning.

Was the production as technically assured as some professional productions? No. Did it have as big a heart? Hell yeah.

My advice is, of course, to write the play you want to write. But when you consider your potential audience, think beyond the small group of people who may attend your premiere season. There are more people than you think out there, in places you may have never even heard of who may be keen to perform, or attend a production of, your play.

One community theatre that has commissioned new works is Christchurch's Cas'n'ova. Director Craig Hutchison says the group has commissioned plays on three occasions and they have gone down well with audiences. A major consideration in their play selection is what they know their community audience will enjoy, rather than staging a play because they like it.

"We look for plays that will appeal to our community and entertain the audience. We have worked with several well-known and respected New Zealand writers. It's about respecting, honouring and entertaining.

"I am always looking to find innovative ways to present a work and will interpret the staging of a play often with discussions with the writer, especially new plays. Our audiences love to see great comedy and drama that is written sometimes with a New Zealand flavour."

April Phillips' work, for example, is always popular with Cas'n'ova audiences – as well as elsewhere in the country. Phillips' plays *Stiff*, *Bonking James Bond*, *Death and Taxes*, *Snip* and *Motel* are among the top 20 most-performed titles in community theatres in the country from 2010-19. She is only bettered in number of titles by Roger Hall with *Four Flat Whites in Italy* sitting at number one, and *Footrot Flats* (co-written with AK Grant), *Social Climbers* and *A Shortcut to Happiness* also featuring in the top 20. Works by Fiona Farrell, Alannah O'Sullivan, Alison Quigan, Dave Armstrong, Fiona Samuel, Stephen Sinclair and Anthony McCarten, Jean Betts, Michelanne Forster, Tim Hambleton and David Geary also make the list.

In October, Cas'n'ova will stage Joe Musaphia's comedy *Ugly Customers*, which explores a frustration many Kiwis will recognise – the service, or lack of it, we receive from our financial institutions. With such a familiar theme, this is another script that works well for community theatres.

At Howick Little Theatre, the HLT Studio has staged a new New Zealand work virtually every year since 2014. In recent times, whenever possible with a mainbill New Zealand work, the writer is invited to take part in a public 'Conversation with the Playwright' evening before the play opens. This free opportunity brings their work to the attention of more people.

A plot that people could relate to was one of the reasons the group chose to stage *Home Land*: it centres on an Auckland-based woman, who has taken her husband and teenage daughter back to her childhood home in Central Otago so that she and her farmer brother can do what they think is best for their ailing father's future. And yet this play has had only nine community theatre productions since it premiered in 2005. It is just one of several high-impact scripts performed at Howick Little Theatre in recent years. Others have included Henderson's timeless classic *Peninsula*, about a young boy's unsettling 1960s childhood on Banks Peninsula; Carl Nixon's *The Raft*, about a family adrift after the death of their child; Michele Amas' "women can do anything" comedy *The Pink Hammer*; and Dave Armstrong's *King and Country*. This last play was written using material drawn from letters, poems and newspaper reports of the World War I period, accompanied by a live brass band. The stories left no one untouched. A large box of tissues sat on a table in the foyer for audiences to grab as they left.

There's no question that play selection is difficult. It requires a lot of time, research and active theatregoing. Dame Pat Evison maybe summarised it best, "Play selection seems to require a mixture of clairvoyance, stargazing, second sight, tarot reading and other imprecise abilities, plus enough funding to be able to stick one's neck out."

However, we don't need any of those things to know that New Zealand stories do engage audiences and that they will be seen a lot more on community-theatre stages in years to come.



HAPPILY, THERE IS NO
AGE FOR RETIREMENT
IN THEATRE

APRIL PHILLIPS IN WHANGANUI

I try to get to as many productions of my plays as possible. Especially the theatre companies I've had a long relationship with. Like Whanganui's Amdram. I went to Whanganui Girls' College in the '80s and received my basic training as a company actor under director David Smiles at the then semi-professional Four Seasons Theatre. In my Seventh Form year my evenings were spent running around in lingerie in the many bedroom farces that got much needed bums on seats.

During the day I went to school. My French teacher, Mrs Street, was also an actress at Four Seasons along with her husband Mike. I always felt very awkward addressing Mrs Street by her first name Joan in the evenings. In my undies. Since school, our relationship has morphed from teacher/student to stage colleagues to a loving and enduring friendship.

Joan and Mike continued to be a force for theatre in Whanganui as writers of a weekly arts column and as directors of their theatre company Rivercity Players. They enthusiastically staged all my plays and I proudly attended.

In 2020 Joan and Mike were cast as the husband and wife leads in my drama *Blind Eye*. Like so many productions, rehearsals started and were postponed due to Covid. The original director had to drop out and was replaced by one of the cast, Chris McKenzie. When the play finally opened earlier this year Joan, at 82, told me this would be her swan song. Her last performance. She was extremely nervous because of the size and weight of the emotionally and physically challenging role but mostly because she wanted her last performance to do me proud. She needn't have worried. They were both wonderful. On closing night I wept, along with the rest of the audience. Joan received the best rave reviews of her career. The perfect curtain call for a life on stage.

Yet now she's asked to read my comedy *Swingers* about sex and golf in retirement. Happily, there is no age for retirement in theatre.

ABOVE: *Blind Eye* by April Phillips, Amdram Theatre, Whanganui. Image: Ian Jones.

A ZOOM WITH TWO CITIES

*Playwrights Benny Marama in Kirikiriroa and
Abby Howells in Ōtepoti in conversation.*

Abby: Benny, have you always lived in Hamilton?

Benny: For a couple of years I lived in Wellington. I went to Vic, studied public policy for no good reason... But yeah I've lived here most of my life. It's a city I love, it's a city that seems to be 'discovered' by Auckland every couple of years – there's an article that's like "oh, did you know Hamilton exists? And it's got a burgeoning arts community?" Burgeoning? Nah!

I could have gone to Auckland, or stayed in Wellington. But here I have the opportunity to be seen and to show and be someone who can mentor and help to grow the community and myself. Which I suppose is a nice way of saying 'big fish, little pond' but that insults the pond, it doesn't really give the pond much credit. I got this opportunity to work here at Meteor Theatre and I'm going into it with a full heart, a clear mind and with energy and purpose.

Why did you come back to Dunedin?

Abby: Why did I do that? I guess I'd lost a lot of confidence. I'd had a big success with my first play and then I did a few shows after that and they didn't go as well – in my own head they didn't go as well. So, I decided that I wanted to prioritise being where my support network is, where my family and my friends are. Which, I think looking back has had a massive effect on my writing. I've grown in confidence. I feel like I have reconnected with my voice and I know what I want to say... and I put a lot of that growth on my being in Dunedin. I think as I'm getting older I'm realising that it's worth prioritising feeling good, feeling happy and actually that is when I do my best stuff. The whole 'tortured artist' thing is pure lies.

Benny: Yeah, totally. Can I roll back to writing one thing and then losing confidence? That's exactly how I felt.

Abby: Oh really? You too? Yes! You can't live up to the first thing that you did!



'BIG FISH, LITTLE POND' ...
INSULTS THE POND,
IT DOESN'T REALLY GIVE
THE POND MUCH CREDIT

Benny: Yes! After *thursdays.child* I was like, huh, what do I do now? Because I was in this mindset of 'I've peaked' I didn't recognise that what I had was actually really cool, I'd let myself be blind to all of the good stuff.

Do you think being in a small town affected your writing?

Abby: I was talking to my friend about this the other day. We were saying that we think being from Dunedin does kind of give you a unique perspective and voice. When there's not that many other writers around, you kind of end up doing your own thing and developing in isolation. I watched this documentary about Martin Phillipps and The Chills and I think it was Graeme Downes who described the Dunedin music scene as a cauldron, bubbling away from everyone else, down the bottom of the South Island. I felt like that could describe the writing scene as well. No one really knows what we're doing down here, which in some ways is quite freeing. Do you think of yourself as a Hamilton writer?

Benny: I'd say that. It can be hard being in a smaller city, you struggle to be seen by other writers in other communities in New Zealand. But I do wear the Hamilton-writer with pride, I'm legitimately done apologising being from Hamilton.

Abby: Oh, I know that feeling. I have really complicated feelings about where I'm from, I love it, I hate it. When I was younger I just wanted to get out of here and I will rag on Dunedin until the cows come home, but if someone who is not from Dunedin says anything bad about it I will be like "how dare you!"

Benny: Yes same, like "I will punch you!" I'm trying really hard to not make this an advertisement for The Meteor but I honestly think I would not still be in Hamilton if it wasn't for this space and this community. I'd argue that that would be the same for a lot of writers here. Having a space to express has really helped.

I really wanted to watch your play *White Men*, have you thought of bringing it up here?

Abby: I would love to! *White Men*, that was a Covid-casualty, hopefully it will rise again. It was funny with that play, I usually do a lot of planning but with that one I just got really mad and sat down at my laptop and just went “ahhhhhh!”

Have you had an ‘ahhhhhh!’ play?

Benny: Not an ‘ahhhhhh’ necessarily. But I was in Peru and I just started thinking, so what if we leaned hard into the gay subtext in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*? What if we did that? And then it was like “bombbombombom!” And I was listening to Sam Smith’s cover of ‘I Feel Love’ just on repeat as I was writing this hyper-queer ‘90s adaptation of *Dorian Gray*. I love that zone where you’re just like letting your energy and inspiration drive you forward. That said, it is kind of dangerous because, I know I do try to wait for that moment.

Abby: Oh totally. I thought for a while I’ve got to be in that zone to create art! But then I realised, for me the plodding along and working on something every day and refining and all that stuff is an equally big part of writing.

We’d love to have you in Dunedin! We may not have a space at the moment but there is a community. And I can show you the cool places.

Benny: I’m super keen.

Abby: I feel like Hamilton and Dunedin are not like, on everyone’s list of places to go. So if someone makes the effort to come down to Dunedin, I love it.

Benny: Exactly! We had a tour in from a well-known New Zealand theatre company and ah, ours was the only show of their season to sell out!

It’s awesome when these companies recognise that we are here, but don’t treat us like ‘oh Hamilton, how quaint.’

Abby: ‘How provincial!’ Do you feel when a show comes to Hamilton – like a touring show – responsible in some way for the audience? Because I feel this! If someone comes to Dunedin and it’s a poor turn out or the audience is not responsive I always want to say to the performers “I’m so sorry on behalf of them!” Or if they’re a good crowd I’m like “good job Dunedin, yes!”

Benny: Yes. I also feel the same about local creators. If I don’t see every single creative person I’ve ever met in Hamilton at this local writer’s play or this local director’s play I will lose my shit.

Abby: Me too! I notice! I take names! I know exactly who has not shown up!

Benny: Oh yeah, oh yeah. I did a solo last year after lockdown and I took notes of who didn’t come because a local company staged Nick Payne’s play *Constellations* directed by Melisa Martin the week after and suddenly I saw every person from the theatre community there and a bunch of them said “Hey, when’s your next thing coming up?” And I’d reply “last week!”

Abby: I did a solo show as well and I took it even more personally if people didn’t show up, because like, I’m putting myself on the line here, come on Dunedin! I am one of you! I think I need to think the best of people and realise that the reason some people don’t come is not because they don’t want to support me, or they don’t like what I do but this week was genuinely not a good week for them and they would have gone if they could.

Benny: Yeah, not everyone can be everything to you and that’s ok. That’s absolutely ok.

Abby: It’s a uniquely our-sized-town problem in that we know all the theatre community.

Benny: And, small town, no matter how great we do, the sports teams will always take priority.

Abby: I can never compete with a classmate who got into the Highlanders, no way!



I FEEL LIKE HAMILTON
AND DUNEDIN ARE NOT,
LIKE, ON EVERYONE'S
LIST OF PLACES TO GO

Benny: Oh never! So, what are you working on next?

Abby: I've got a new show. I found this script that I wrote when I was about ten, and it was a post-World War II romance and a very serious drama. But I never finished it, I gave up halfway through. So I'm going to finish the story I wrote when I was a kid and celebrate the child that I was. So it's kind of about growing up and not really being what you thought you'd be, but celebrating it anyway.

Benny: That sounds so great.

Abby: Thank you! I like comedy that's really joyful, and humour that's more about connecting with people, rather than at anyone's expense, even my own. How about yourself?

Benny: I've got two things on the go, one is the queer Dorian Gray play – I love titles and this one is called *Basilisk*. I love the idea of this queer, female '90s Dorian. And the other one is a

PREVIOUS PAGE: *The Prince and the Pea* by Geoff Houtman, adapted by Benny Marama, Electra Theatre Company, The Meteor. Image: Guy Coker.

ABOVE: Abby Howells.
Image: Tabitha Arthur.

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YOU REALLY CAN'T AVOID NOSTALGIA SOMETIMES

slightly more personal... comedy? I guess? It's called *Karanga in the Autumn Breeze*. Now, a friend of mine who taught at a school here, she is Māori and she walked into the office and the administrator at the desk said to her "Oh, it's like you've Karanga-ed in the autumn breeze!" And I told her, that is an excellent title for a play.

So I thought about a high school drama and, firstly – this isn't to say this play is awful, it's a classic – but we were always forced to do *The Pohutukawa Tree* by Bruce Mason, always, and I felt like it rang a little differently in a predominantly brown high school. It was our only exposure to New Zealand theatre and our only representations of us. And I'm not Māori, I'm from the Cook Islands, but we would only see ourselves portrayed as a young woman in an interracial relationship, a drunk, or as a super pious older woman. Those were the three people we were and I resented the play for that. *Karanga in the Autumn Breeze* kind of takes place in two worlds, one part is the students of this drama class performing scenes from this play *Karanga in the Autumn Breeze* and the other

part is about the students themselves. At the moment it's taking the form of a discussion about representation and being fifteen and being confronted with how you look to everyone else via this play and what that says.

Abby: Interesting that both of us are writing stuff that is quite connected to youth and childhood. I don't know if that is part of being in your hometown, like you can't escape it. You walk down the street and you know a key moment of your life happened here, you really can't avoid nostalgia sometimes.

Benny: Yeah exactly, you are confronted by it constantly. People know who you are and are expecting a lot and that's part of what mucks you up with being a writer is that because you are visible, everyone is waiting to see what you are going to do. You get the whole "so are you still doing drama?"

Abby: Oh yes, it's always 'drama'! 'What are you doing next?' 'When are you going to be on *Shortland Street*?'

Benny: I have never had any desire to be on *Shortland Street*. Circling back, I'd rather create the worlds than inhabit them.

Abby: Oh my gosh, you just cycled round and finished it perfectly!

Benny: I'm so sorry! Did I force the conversation into 'and now we're done'?

Abby: No! It was perfect!

ABOVE: Benny Marama. Image: Megan Goldsman.

A SHIFT FROM THE CENTRE

*Innovation in theatre in regional Aotearoa and its strong
connection with community building. By Tulia Thompson.*



Strong growth is happening in the arts in the regions, and it breaks old ‘city mouse/country mouse’ stereotypes – in theatre in recent years, there’s been a strong sense of a shift from the centre – to a more diverse and spread culture. From development spaces like The Meteor in Hamilton to major touring venues like Toitoti in Heretaunga and the Oamaru Opera House; or new festival models like Te Tairāwhiti, Aronui in Rotorua and Reset in Taranaki. The annual theatre calendar continues to expand outwards due to touring.

In this feature Tulia Thompson considers three models of regional innovation in Whangārei, Tauranga and the Hawke’s Bay, and we have reports from Alex Wilson in Ōtepoti and Alexandra Bellad-Ellis in Te Papaioea.

As I walk across the carpark, the sun is pale lemon, sinking below the forested hills of Ngahere o Pukenui, which frames the theatre as a quiet presence. Insects hum, the remaining sky is violet blue. The transformed church hall that houses Oneonesix theatre in Whangārei, is painted matte black, with white window frames. A purple concrete wall beside the carpark announces ‘Theatre’ and ‘Art’ in gold, capital letters.

Over the last six years, Oneonesix has evolved from abandoned church hall to vibrant theatre and thriving hotspot of local innovation. Whangārei is a city in Te Tai Tokerau, 170 kilometres north of Auckland and home to a population of 54,000 people. Things are changing here and the arts is a part of it: major recent public art projects dot around the redeveloped town basin and later this year, with much excitement brewing, the Hundertwasser Arts Centre, housing a major national Māori art gallery will open.

Oneonesix is a home for local productions – like those of theatre company Company of Giants – assisting with the development of visiting productions and supporting local theatre practitioners. It’s grown a fierce, loyal and passionate audience.

Oneonesix for me is a great example of the innovation happening in regional theatre in New Zealand – it provides a road map for a community centred, professionally led regional

excellence. I talk to actor Laurel Devenie and theatre director Georgia May Russ – who were both part of a group who launched the inaugural Whangārei Fringe Festival last year (it's back again in October 2021). I also talk to other North Island regional innovators – James Wilson in Tauranga and Puti Lancaster in Hawke's Bay.

It seems to me that innovation in the arts broadly requires the twin engines of introspection (space to create, which is inward-looking) alongside an external flowering of people working in the same creative space. But creating those conditions is often tricky and elusive, especially in smaller centres. We talk about creativity as something that just happens, like falling in love and dying.

Devenie is passionate about the creative possibilities Oneonesix offers theatremakers: "The space doesn't promise anything. It's humble. It still can be a black box and it's got all the basic rig and everything as you'll see, but it's not too 'theatre', and it doesn't promise anything more than it is. It holds work in a different way."

We sit at Laurel's long wooden table drinking black tea with oat milk. Outside her window, oak leaves are traversing the spectrum between green and brown. Laurel has a quiet presence – a mix of earthiness and energy. Her 12-year-old stepdaughter is entertaining the toddler in another room.

Laurel is perhaps most recognisable from a three-year stint on *Shortland Street*. She is Toi Whakaari-trained and also studied with John Bolton, whose approach to devising physical theatre has also influenced companies like Indian Ink and Red Leap. She likes magic. She loves work that genuinely talks to both children and adults. Her work is often giant, but she is exploring work that is small. She wants to tell more intimate stories.

Laurel says "It's been amazing for me to realise that this is actually the place where I want to make work. In a community where I feel I can take huge risks creatively."

Laurel's realisation about creative risk-taking in the community struck me as being at the heart of innovation. It asks us to reconsider how rural and small towns have been devalued because of a pervasive narrative that art comes from urban centres. When I tried to unpack this narrative in my head, it occurred to me that it's probably been transported from England with, you know, colonisation. A rethink might be in order.

Laurel's comment about creative risk-taking felt deeply salient to innovation – we take risks creatively when we feel safety and trust and connection.

Laurel had spent earlier summers returning to her hometown and putting together theatre pieces; creating things at a grand-scale at a frenetic pace. Devising. One summer, she put together a giant production of *The Odyssey* at the Quarry Arts Centre, a celebrated arts centre in Whangārei based at an old quarry. The company built a ship from the frame of a van from the wreckers, and also used donated pieces of bamboo, someone else had homing pigeons. There was the magic of putting something together from nothing. Of using what you have.

She explains that it's 'Stone Soup', the folk story of an old woman who creates soup from a stone by asking each villager in turn for a carrot, or a potato, or a tired brown onion, some rainbow chard, a little oil, some brown lentils, and a small handful of parsley. It ends up being a feast.

So when Laurel was confronted with a rundown hall and \$30 in the bank account of her theatre company, her instinct was to ask the community for help. Laurel and her collaborator Ash Holwell had contacted the council needing space for a theatre workshop. The church hall had been empty for a few years, and was going to be sold. The space worked its own magic, "You go 'Oh, my God, we can't, we can't sell this off, you know, it's a community asset'."



“There was a huge amount of having to ask people for support – actually just literally, not even money.” For working bees, and the local tradie, when the lights were broken. Eventually for money too – a crowdfunding campaign raised nearly \$10,000 to cover costs after the first year.

“Asking the community for help has had the unintended consequence of strong community engagement. Something marketers might cynically call buy-in, but which I would call connection.”

And it's not just the helpers. It's the people who turn up each Monday night for drop-in choir rehearsal, or learn how to DJ in the tiny onsite booth of Beagle FM, a local radio station. One of the DJs runs a group for men called 'Vinyl and Yarns' out of Oneonesix. In a moment of synchronicity, Laurel invites them to attend rehearsal for *Every Brilliant Thing*, because the main character talks about his love for records. English playwright Duncan Macmillan's *Every Brilliant Thing* was being toured to Whangarei and small Hokianga town Rawene by Auckland's Silo Theatre.

When I walk into Oneonesix, a man wearing a tweed cheesecutter hat and Converse sneakers is perched mid-way up some stairs looking

at his phone. Behind him is an explosion of A4 colour printed posters from the shows that have performed there; that cacophony of posters you might find in community-led theatre anywhere. In the room, there is a vinyl and orange fabric couch from the '70s, and a round wooden table. On the blue couch is a hand-crocheted blanket of blue and yellow squares. There's a glass chandelier, and then as an afterthought, a flock of red silk Chinese lanterns. The kitchenette is over-lit by those fluorescent tube lights you can find in church halls and marae up and down the country.

In a smaller room, with a wide desk with a few small cacti is Oneonesix's theatre manager Georgia May Russ. Georgia, a Whangārei local, met Laurel through Northland Youth Theatre. She was 14 when she auditioned. Now she is 25, and has been working at the Theatre for two years. Acting and devising with Company of Giants and Northland Youth Theatre led to a passion for directing.

PREVIOUS PAGE: *The Contours of Heaven* by Ana Chaya Scotney, Marama Beamish and Puti Lancaster, Zanetti Productions. Image: Andi Crown Photography.

ABOVE: *The Animals* by Anthony Crum, Thomas Gowing and Laurel Devenie, Company of Giants, Nga Purapura, Kaeo.



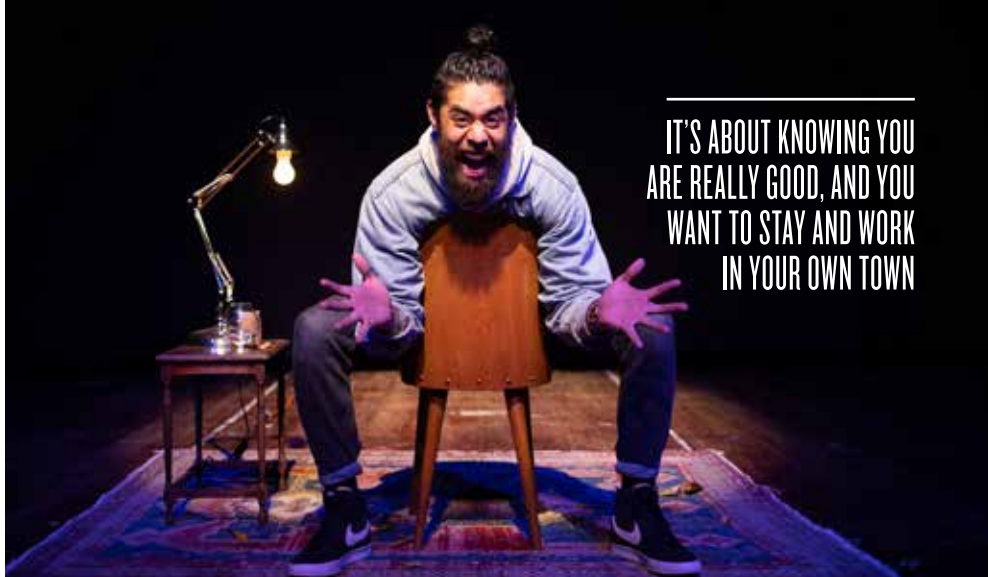
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ARE REALLY GOOD, AND YOU
WANT TO STAY AND WORK
IN YOUR OWN TOWN

She is interested in developing work exploring women's empowerment, and also exploring her whakapapa.

"The biggest thing that I'm realising is there's no point in waiting for someone else to offer you the opportunity. You just take it. You've just got to start creating, researching and finding those creative ideas and those creative people that will help you to bring those creative ideas forward. That's kind of where I'm finding is the biggest thing for me right now is just making it myself. In my own theatre."

The small theatre has around 106 brown, plastic seats. There are still worn white markings for a basketball court, from Oneonesix's youth centre days. *Every Brilliant Thing* has really strong audience participation, and so I'm nerdily trying to assess how much is the writing or acting or the actual audience. There were sustained interactions where people read out numbered cards, and even stood in for family members – it felt in keeping with this community-centred space. The humility and warmth exuded by phenomenal actor Jason Te Kare definitely lowered people's defences. But I think it was the generosity of the audience, who were probably the most engaged audience I have ever witnessed.

The rugged white-haired rural bloke who stepped in to be Dad muttering "Gawd!" under this breath when he was asked to participate, but still delivered a moving impromptu wedding speech for his son. It felt real.

A shift in consciousness happened for Laurel in their first year at Oneonesix, when they staged eight solo performances by Toi Whakaari students – four of whom were Whangārei locals. The audience loved it. The performances sold out and got standing ovations. Laurel realised there was a local appetite for new contemporary New Zealand works; even works still in development. Laurel explains "we have been starved for a long time of it so that there's an audience for it. They're hungry, but they are generous and intelligent."

That small town New Zealand can appreciate and engage with contemporary theatre flies in the face of how theatre in regional New Zealand has been done.

Laurel is often surprised about how much edginess the community can handle. A couple of years ago a theatremaker from New York

ABOVE: *Waiting* by Shadon Meredith, Sos and Sha Creative, Whangārei Fringe Festival, Oneonesix. Image: Sarah Marshall.



A PERVERSIVE NARRATIVE THAT ART COMES FROM URBAN CENTRES

was visiting Auckland with an edgy, bouffon clown show called *Red Bastard*. A friend suggested he go up to “Laurel’s place”.

“I felt really responsible because this dude has come over from New York, and we’re bringing him to this small town.” People loved it. They still come up to Laurel to talk about it, years later. But seeing it performed in a small town changed how she saw and understood the work. It’s a piece that is intended to confront.

Laurel explains “He said, ‘Put up your hand if you hate your job!’ I realised at the Edinburgh Fringe no one knows each other in the audience. And it’s very different – in Whangārei everyone knows.”

Oneonesix enables theatre companies to debut to a small, supportive audience.

ABOVE: *Up Down Girl* adapted from *Up Down Boy* by Sue Shields with Myrtle Theatre Company, The Up Down Project, Globe Theatre, Te Papaioea.
Image: Anu Grace Photography.

It’s valuable for theatre practitioners “to get their work shiny” says Laurel. It’s a symbiotic relationship. But some of the value for theatremakers is that it removes the high-stakes competition for audience. For Laurel, the process of creating theatre “needs to be more about making the work and less about the competition for the audience.”

Another significant part of allowing regional theatre to flourish is recognising the value of local actors and theatremakers. Laurel explains: “There are some great performance makers and art makers here. It’s just not obvious how and where they can present work and make it – so that’s what I’m realising our role is.”

It’s a sentiment that is echoed by James Wilson, newly appointed Manager of Arts and Culture at Tauranga City Council, who believes regional arts doesn’t capture the media attention it deserves: “We have a situation, like many regional cities, where if you’ve got an international star coming to town, they’ll happily put a story in the paper about it, but I’m trying to work with the media to show that actually our own work is equally as exciting and just as valid to celebrate”.



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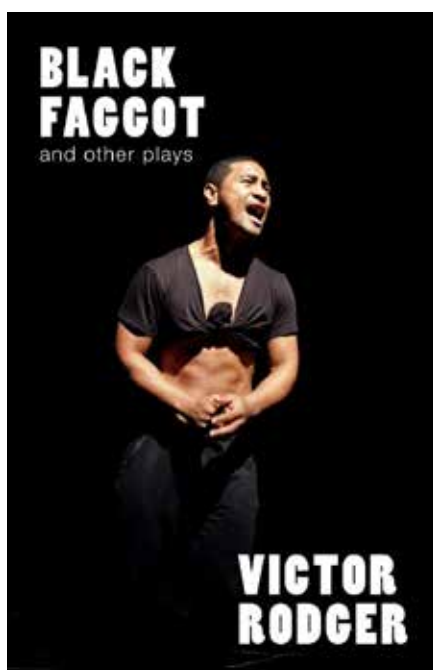
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James should know. He trained as a theatre director at Rose Bruford College in Greenwich, South East London, and worked for various arts organisations including the Lyric Hammersmith and the Tate Modern. James was Chief Executive at Q Theatre between 2012 and 2018. He moved to Tauranga in 2018 to work as General Manager at Baycourt Community Theatre and Arts Centre.

James's role within the council reflects a broader shift to both recognise local government responsibility for community well-being; and that arts and culture is a key component of well-being. It is the first time there has been an arts and culture team within Council, and James will both manage the Council's art investments and liaise with Creative New Zealand. Advocacy for the creative sector is an important component.

James is excited about the developing creative sector. He says that Q theatre's innovation and success was made possible by a highly engaged community of theatremakers. He recognises there is work to be done in building more collaborative practice within the sector. To this end, he is in the early stages of developing a contestable council fund for collaboration.

They are trying to combat the tendency for touring artists to visit and leave with minimal engagement into Tauranga's community or arts with a new programme called *Made in Tauranga*. The concept is they'll invite artists to spend longer in the city and create a work based on it. So far, they've invited Massive Theatre Company to do workshops with rangatahi.

James says people are wanting to tell their own local stories, instead of looking to big cities: "I think that is something to do with a bit of a generational shift of people not waiting for someone to tap you on the shoulder to come and work for the big companies. It's about knowing you are really good, and you want to stay and work in your own town".

For Hawke's Bay theatre director Puti Lancaster, who directed and co-created critically-acclaimed *The Contours of Heaven*, theatre is about creating change. Puti has a conceptual way of thinking – her slow, steady voice pausing when she observes the profound. She is drawn to stories that are under-represented, not voiced or difficult to hear.

The Contours of Heaven premiered at Hawke's Bay Arts Festival in 2017. It went on to the Auckland Fringe and a further season at the Basement in 2018, winning the Excellence award for overall production at the Auckland Theatre Awards and many fringe awards. Then to Oneonesix in Whangārei in 2019 and then over to New York City's Soho Playhouse in January 2020. All that way for the stories of six young people from Te Matau-a-Māui, Hawke's Bay.

The work Puti is currently working on is a collaborative piece called *The Constellation of Families*. A piece from it will go into the Hawkes Bay Arts Festival.

Puti's process of creating work often starts with big, necessary questions. Like the lack of diversity. "Why is it so hard to get diverse stories into festivals or theatre? So then my response to that was to go 'Well then, what are you going to do about it?'" She is a person that takes action.

The devising process begins with asking people whether they would be willing to talk about it. She studied a Masters of Theatre Arts at Toi Whakaari/Victoria University and learnt to understand the thread of a story; how to unravel the stories laid out by people. She only works with verbatim theatre now, a process of using people's actual words instead of fiction.

Puti's advice is to "be really clear about what you are making and who you are making it for". It's difficult to get people to understand that the stories of ordinary people are actually theatre and the amount of development that goes into creating the piece.

The Contours of Heaven started with rangatahi that Puti already knew. Relationships are vital.



IT IS ABOUT
BUILDING THEATRE
ECOSYSTEMS
THAT PRIVILEGE
LOCAL VOICES

She learnt about them and collaborated on the work. What moves her profoundly is the way people devalue their own stories. She spoke to a kaumatua who said he didn't think anyone else would want to listen.

Fundamental to Puti's process is a profound respect for the people sharing their stories. She explains it's about recognising 'that service of someone who koha's their story. Their language might be different but I hear it in the way that they all are giving a koha. So then I'm part of this koha giving for the benefit of another person who I haven't met. And then that's when we think about the people that don't come.'

The inaccessibility of theatre is still an important issue for Puti – theatre is too expensive, and that acts as a barrier to theatre and storytelling.

What are the building blocks for innovation in regional theatre? My conversations with theatre practitioners and advocates leads me to believe it is about building theatre ecosystems that privilege local voices, challenging the narratives of centre-knows-best, having useable spaces, funding, support structures, and community. Also, that creativity can be the risks that happen when

you trust your audience, or about finding the electric charge of authentic engagement. It can be what happens when you keep the costs down at a local theatre and build a new generation of theatremakers.

An idea that seems useful is Laurel's explanation of Oneonesix as "the bottom rung": Laurel explains, "We are the bottom rung of the ladder and we want to stay there. Maybe the tone of conversation is, how do you create that bottom rung? What does it look like in that community?"

I can think of parallels across the arts where available funding based on excellence doesn't necessarily fuel skills development, or create opportunities for getting work out.

Devenie believes that fundamentally, creating innovation in theatre is about removing the barriers. That means paying creatives fairly.

Puti would agree. She says that if you are an independent "It can be a struggle to be resourced to get a place to actually just go and make the work – like a hall or a garage or somewhere if you don't have the money for that."

ABOVE: *Sorry for Your Loss* by Cian Gardner, The Meteor Theatre. Image: Kelsy Scott.



WHAT IT IS LIKE TO GROW UP IN REGIONAL AOTEAROA

TE PAPAIOEA

A city with a strong theatre history. Alexandra Bellad-Ellis scans the current scene in Palmerston North by looking at what's on the boards this year.

I may be biased, but this town sure is a hot-bed of talent and can-do attitude. Palmerston North jumped into this new year with gusto in February with a brand new annual arts festival, Papaioea, demonstrating the city's range of creative spaces (it builds on a Palmy Fringe festival in 2018). A smorgasbord of shows descended on town, but all that Covid-19 contingency planning came into effect, with the country entering level 2 mere hours before the festival was due to kick off.

While Papaioea Festival lost their purpose-built garden base, the show went on. The Regent Theatre, complete with plastic barriers, scanning codes and hand sanitiser hosted The Modern Māori Quartet and *What's a Samoan?* by Tofiga Fepulea'i and James Nokise. The latter saw the two men live and work in the city for a week, gathering local stories and meeting people who helped inspire the final performance.

Ephemeral Theatre staged Amy Atkins' solo *Potluck* at artist-run space Snails. Here people could share stories, recipes, and dishes overseen by their host Anastasia. Atkins grew up and began her career in Palmerston North. Over at the 39-year-old Globe Theatre, a home for many community theatre groups and touring shows, Dusty Room Productions put on *Alone*. A play by Luke Thornborough, it examined space exploration, feminism, climate change and David Bowie. This play had

ABOVE: *Cringe Worthy!*
devised by Andrea Sanders,
Centrepoint Theatre.
Image: Paul McLaughlin.

already won The Best Theatre Award at the 2020 Auckland Fringe Festival and the 2020 PANNZ Tour Ready Production Award. After this came *Chance: Short Plays on Love and Destiny*, by local playwright Angie Farrow rounding out the first festival of the year.

As for the rest of 2021, The Globe has a full calendar ranging from stand up comedy, to burlesque, music to film, dance and theatre. Worth highlighting already in April from South Auckland's Aorere Film Academy was *Code-Switch*, a blend of film, dance and live theatre; written by Nirvika Nair, Marietta Apulu and Lex Shoemark, and directed by Ryan Patumaka. The work followed two New Zealand students from low socio-economic backgrounds as they enter Camp Mana, preparing students to succeed in the real world. Little Dog Barking Theatre Company presented *Rainbows and Fishes* in English, Te Reo and Samoan, written by the late Peter Wilson and directed by himself and Lyndee-Jane Rutherford.

Around the corner Centrepont Theatre remains the only professional theatre outside of New Zealand's three biggest centres, and has been going since 1974. Here you will find Centrepont's Basement Company – which since 2005 has provided an intensive full-year programme for emerging theatremakers. This year's production is new work *Move*. The local performers devised this work alongside directors Lizzie Tollemache and Fergus Aitken, giving the audience a glimpse into what it is like to grow up in regional Aotearoa. Continuing with the theme of regional stories Centrepont also presents *The Complete History of Palmerston North (Abridged)* by Gregory Cooper, as part of the city's 150th anniversary celebrations.

Supporting local stories are the Sunday Script Sessions in September. New one act plays are matched with a cast, a director, and a directorial mentor. Then the cast have one day of rehearsal before presenting the piece to a live audience. Last year Centrepont was a leader nationally in creating a new Aotearoa theatre lockdown project, the 24 Hour Challenge where 10 playwrights had 12 hours to write a monologue, and actors 12 hours to rehearse, learn and record their responses.

Across the road is Centrepont's second space The Dark Room. It's a stripped back space providing a less expensive venue for smaller productions to present their work. It is here that you will find many of our younger local performers. In May it was *Boy Mestizo* by James Roque, a well-known face on the local stand up comedy scene. James presents his story of coming to New Zealand and the baggage he may have inadvertently brought with him. Also in May was *The Bicycle and the Butcher's Daughter*, a one woman play written by Sue Rider and Helen Moulder speaking to rural concerns.

Then there is Massey University, a starting point for many talented theatremakers. Students can take papers such as Creative Processes and Making Plays for Theatre, where not only does each student produce a play, they also get together in groups to put on a public performance. This performance is written and staged by the students themselves (with help from Rachel Lennart). Massey University continues to strive to bring diverse, regional voices to the stage. The major problem being finding enough venues to host them.

With new shows being added what feels like daily, it's safe to say that regional theatre is alive and thriving in this town.



ŌTEPOTI'S CURRENT SITUATION RAISES THE QUESTION OF WHAT IS THE LARGER STRATEGY FOR THE REGIONAL CENTRES OF NEW ZEALAND

DIFFERENT SHADES OF BLUE

Alex Wilson on Dunedin's frustrations in developing a professional theatre and venues

Ōtepoti Dunedin lacks the infrastructure, funding and buy-in from the wider community to create a sustainable professional theatre industry. It's important to note that this was broadly the case during the lifetime of the Fortune Theatre; the loss of the sole professional theatre in 2018 was a symptom and not the cause. Very few practitioners in this city can call themselves professional in the truest sense of the word. What little infrastructure the city has is aging, inaccessible or lacks the size and resource to house work that would promote a professional industry.

While there are many fine local practitioners and organisations, it's impossible to sustain a year-round calendar of work. Practitioners lack employment, burnout from working pro bono, compromise their work due to substandard infrastructure and spend their time finding solutions to unforeseen problems instead of creating theatre. Audiences cannot grow – it's hard for consumers to see theatre as a legitimate entertainment option when offered infrequently, and of differing standards.

In October 2018, Dunedin City Council and Creative New Zealand commissioned a study by consultancy firm Charcoalblue, to investigate how to ensure the continued provision of professional theatre with a focus on sustainability and explore a purpose-built performing arts venue (this is a three-phase study, with the third phase not yet released as I

ABOVE: 2021 Dunedin Fringe Festival makeshift arts space White Box. Image: Max Cao.

write, therefore information concerning the study in this article should be considered partial and incomplete.)

There have been issues with the study's rollout of information since the project's inception due to timeline disruptions from Covid-19 and a change of council and city CEO. These delays in communication have aggravated some parts of the theatre community who feel as though practitioners were not adequately consulted for the study, despite a nine-month engagement process.

There have also been frustrations that reports released so far have been dominated by the scoping of a new performance venue, with less discussion of the wider issues that surround the sustainability of a professional industry: strong governance, building audiences and creating career pathways, for example. While Ōtepoti has been crying out for an accessible, modern, purpose-built venue for over half a century, simply put, a house does not make a home. It is understood discussion of sustainable governance is to be more of a feature in the final phase report.

The recommended venues are not without complications. The Charcoalblue study identified 14 sites for the proposed venue. However, due to financial constraints created by the global epidemic, the two options that will be discussed by the public as part of the city's ten-year plan are a redevelopment of the Athenaeum building in the Octagon and the historical Mayfair Theatre in South Dunedin, which Charcoalblue ranked as the 5th and 8th best options respectively. For context, a redevelopment of the now derelict Fortune Theatre was ranked 6th.

Currently, there are no public plans concerning the proposed venue's look and layout, yet a 200-300 seat capacity has been mentioned. This figure has resulted in some anxiety about whether these spaces will be accessible for the local arts ecosystem or will be more suited for national touring shows. The phase two report recommends

that the space will need ongoing investment from the council to make the spaces accessible to local groups and that the infrastructure should accommodate a way to "downsize" their capacities for more intimate performances. Both options will rely on extensive borrowing and rate increases. It's uncertain if either venue will emerge from the proposal stage – historically often the final resting place of any significant plans to redevelop the city's arts infrastructure, due to fiscally conservative ratepayers.

The report identifies a few concepts of what a year-round programme at a new venue might look like. Yet to be made public is how many artists would have access, how many would be employed and how the new venue will be part of a larger plan to invigorate a professional theatre industry in Dunedin. Employment for one show a year does not create a sustainable professional career. These questions might be outside the scope of local government, but this was part of the initial purview of the Charcoalblue study. The findings of the phase three report will be crucial in understanding how local artists and organisations would interact in this brave new world.

Ōtepoti's current situation raises the question of what is the larger strategy for the regional centres of New Zealand. Do we wish to create a tiered system where the regions are seen as stepping stones to the larger centres, wherein local practitioners get by on working once or twice a year on paid work (if that)? Is there also room for a robust national touring circuit alongside strong regional centres that promote and create local stories within a sustainable local professional industry?

If the goal is to grow the industry in the regions there needs to be an evolution in how we view artistic careers in the country. That is impossible without significant, regular financial investment, the development of organisations that provide opportunities for theatremakers and the creation of career pathways in the regions.

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Over the years The Court worked with world-renown London-based architects Haworth Tompkins

and the Christchurch City Council. Last July, the contracts were signed, and now we are calling for expressions of interest for the company that will actually hold the hammers. Ground-breaking is timed for October 2021, and fundraising has begun.

The Court Theatre’s new home in the Performing Arts Precinct of the City of Christchurch will open in October 2023. Mark it on your calendar – there’s going to be one hell of a party!

The Court Theatre sends aroha to Aotearoa’s theatre community and beyond, and looks forward to extending manaakitanga to you when you next come to Ōtautahi.

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WELL WROUGHT

John Smythe on the rich legacy of Bruce Mason.

Even now, as we mark the centenary of Bruce Mason's birth, I would challenge anyone to witness good productions of his plays without identifying, relating, feeling, thinking and questioning. A playwright by vocation, Mason was driven to interrogate himself and the world at large in dramatic ways that draw audiences into the enquiry.

His experiences of family life in Takapuna (fictionalised as Te Parenga), study at Victoria College, war service in the Royal Navy; his work on a citrus farm, as a public servant, in advertising and as editor of *Te Ao Hou*; his being a husband and father and astute observer of those around him... All these realities feed his vivid imagination along with his humanity, insights and sharp wit.

A master craftsman of well-wrought plays, in which flawed people with formative pasts navigate the present in light of their future objectives, Mason invariably challenges us to test our own values as we judge his characters. While each play is anchored in time and place, by blending fact, fiction, reality and fantasy in his quest for that elusive taonga, 'truth', his distillations of the particular and personal are timeless and universal.

Most particular and personal are his suite of autobiographical solos – *The End of the Golden Weather* (childhood; loss of innocence) – remounted in 2021 as *Every Kind of Weather*, directed by Shane Boshier and performed in repertoire by Stephen Lovatt, *Not Christmas But Guy Fawkes* (adolescence; self-satirising) and *Courting Blackbird* (young adulthood; political awakening).

Mason's early short and satirical plays include *The Bonds of Love* and *The Evening Paper*, which provocatively contrast male and female archetypes in very different ways. The failure of Kiwi men to form fulfilling relationships with women and the stultifying conformity of suburban life in the '50s are insightfully critiqued.

The central focus of his first full-length play, *The Pohutukawa Tree*, is a whaea and determined kaitiaki of what little ancestral whenua is left. She, her teenage children and their land are profoundly affected by the actions of a comprehensive range of Pākehā men and women. An acknowledged classic, its themes remain as resonant as ever.

It was the eloquence of te reo, in which he became fluent, that drew Mason to tikanga Māori. Commissioned to write a radio play for

the great bass-baritone Inia Te Wiata, he wrote four, all looking at Māori-Pākehā relationships, all rich with complex characters, insightful wit and politically challenging perception; all later adapted for stage production.

Awatea finds a rural son under pressure to meet the academic expectations of his father and hapū. *The Hand on the Rail* sees a son rejecting his farming father's culture, going to the city for the Pākehā lifestyle and being subjected to racism. In *Swan Song*, a daughter and her dying father become snowbound in an alpine resort. Having served with the Māori Battalion in Europe and fallen in love with an Italian opera diva, his medicated hallucinations contrast her passion with his late wife's disenchantment.

Rich in satire, *Hongi* is an epic tragedy that sets the traditional utu-bound ethics of Hongi Hika against those of Bay of Islands missionaries and Britain's King George IV, whose collective hypocrisies enable the escalation of the Musket Wars.

Birds in the Wilderness profiles a disparate group's attempt to live communally post-war. *The Light Enlarging*, later re-named *Virtuous Circle*, dramatises a woman's attempt to break free of a conventional marriage despite the expectations of her husband and daughter.

After travelling to Russia with a cultural delegation in 1958, then protesting the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia a decade later, Mason wrote *To Russia with Love* contrasting socio-political value systems.

In *Zero Inn*, a high-achieving, under-educated and overbearing advertising executive has dragged his embittered wife and her mother to his remote lakeside sanctuary for Christmas, only to have it 'invaded' by a trio of itinerant counter-culture night-visitors, provoking cathartic confrontations.

Mason's last stage play, *Blood of the Lamb* centres on a lesbian couple whose boarding-school daughter believed one was her father. On discovering otherwise, she escaped to Australia and now returns to confront them.



VIVID REFLECTIONS ON THE HUMAN CONDITION THAT DESERVE TO BE SEEN

Given Mason was bisexual, fully committed to his wife and children while engaging in necessarily covert gay liaisons, it is sadly ironic his brilliant critiques of Kiwi life never included a gay male relationship – except in a never-intended-for-production drama called *Four Healing Dialogues*.

As with Oscar Wilde, Noel Coward and Tennessee Williams, we can only wonder what else he may have written had he not been constrained by the illegality of homosexuality. Meanwhile Bruce Mason has left a rich legacy of vivid reflections on the human condition that deserve to be seen by a new generation of theatre-goers.

ABOVE: *The End of the Golden Weather* by Bruce Mason, a company version by Murray Lynch, Auckland Theatre Company, Maidment Theatre 2011. Image: Michael Smith.

Why I read the play I read

JEAN BETTS

on Smack and Conversations with a Golliwog

Two powerful one-acters I directed in the '70s come to mind. I'm curious to see what a director would do with them today.

Why did I read them? Playmarket had not been going long and scripts were pouring in, playwrights delighted that at last someone was willing to read them. I was one of the early readers. I was hoping to find 'The Great NZ Play' at a time when the NZ play was barely even a thing – but most were painfully drab, dates confirming they'd been shuffled out of bottom drawers into the light of day for the first time in decades. Working my way through them was really getting me down – and then Nonnita Rees handed me *Smack*, one of two short works submitted by young Aucklander Dean Parker, and suggested I direct it. I couldn't believe my luck – it was electrifying, sparkling with energy, intelligence, anger and blistering humour. I felt I'd been hauled out of Gollum's cave into the sunlight.

Quinn, motoring down from Auckland to hometown Napier in his Bedford van with his wary girlfriend, whiles away the drive with a series of lengthy, fiercely funny, dodgy jokes. Underneath the apparent good humour he burns with ugly rage, furious at the hypocrisy

and corruption he sees everywhere – the family cruelty and indifference, the greed and inequality he blames for ruining the lives of his friends, for poisoning the world; the older generation savaging the young. Revolution is in the air; and he has a plan. Desperate for revenge and prepared to resort to violence to get it he's singled out an unfortunate Napier bank manager as his victim.

It's a startling, savage piece of work, no doubt inspired by the plays Dean had seen during a recent stay in London where early Barkers, Shepards, Brentons and co were burning up the stage.

It's a tour de force for an extremely articulate and energetic young actor, in our case Stephen Tozer in top form. As well as the bank manager (a suitably baffled Peter Hayden) there are two small female parts – Quinn's delicate girlfriend and a cheery hitchhiker. (The original script asked for two go-go girls in cages each side of the stage too. Well, it was the '70s. We cut them. He thanked us later.)

I'd love to see it again – set in the '70s, still, of course, with its '70s drug scene, and it's great '70s soundtrack.

I FELT I'D BEEN HAULED OUT OF GOLLUM'S CAVE INTO THE SUNLIGHT



On the other hand Alexander Guyan's *Conversations with a Golliwog* is a great challenge for a young woman. (The offensive 'golliwog' is also a challenge today – but there are solutions.)

I'd read it as a teen, looking for audition pieces I think, and it had haunted me ever since. I know very little about Alexander Guyan (1933-91) and this play was first performed in 1963 at Dunedin's Globe Theatre. I never met him.

Canny starts aged 14 and is 19 by the end of the play. Sensitive, complex and fragile, sharp as a knife, she has a very special relationship with her golliwog, Boswell. However Boswell, with whom she used to confide, conducting long conversations to the consternation of her family, has been silent for some time – ever since a traumatic event involving her brother and a mouse.

The play explores Canny's struggle with difficult family relationships, her anguish at the expectations she's burdened with, despair at the confusions and terrors of womanhood and romance (a time when 'suburban neurosis' was just being identified, sensed and feared by many girls as their miserable fate) until finally it's all too much, her mind gives way and her fantasy world returns.

The only compensation is that, therefore, Boswell begins to talk to her again.

Reading it now I'm reminded forcefully of the attitude to 'mental illness' in those days, to young women who resisted the limitations they were expected to live by, and labelled misfits. Parents and authorities were baffled, teachers scandalised; mothers were disproportionately and often very unfairly blamed! However this very datedness is what makes it most interesting now, I think. Even though great strides in understanding and treatment have been made since, Canny's mental torment will still resonate powerfully.

As well as Canny (a shimmering performance by Christina Milligan in our production) and Boswell (Peter McCauley at his rangy best) two other males and one female are required.

Very different plays but both very clever, very sharp and witty, both exploring aspects of youthful anger and despair, but from completely different angles.

They'd make an interesting retro double-bill.

ABOVE: The Current Offence Group (L-R Michael Noonan, Lindsey Bogle, Alexander Guyan, John McGowan) 1965. Image: Marti Friedlander. Courtesy of the Gerrard and Marti Friedlander Charitable Trust.



TE WHANGANUI-A-TARA 2020

BY JAMES CAIN

2020 started with a vast array of exceptional work. The Six Degrees Festival displayed the bright young things of Victoria University, Dave Armstrong's latest political commentary *The Surprise Party* busted a gut and *A Traveller's Guide to Turkish Dogs* left our hearts full and our face wet with tears.

The New Zealand Festival of the Arts' immense line-up saw audiences treated to a thrilling new musical in workshop (*The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*), a tale of dance as an act of revolution (*Strasbourg 1518*), mesmerising puppetry (*Dimanche*) and hilarious physical comedy (*Släpstick*). New Zealand Fringe was in full swing with a dazzling assortment of experimentation that the festival consistently offers.

But as March began, it was swiftly apparent that the threat of coronavirus was imminent. Works were cancelled, audience capacity reduced, but initially there was an urge to persevere.

Then on 19 March 2020, four days before the Prime Minister's announcement, BATS Theatre put out a statement: "We took a moment today to check in with each other about how we are all feeling at this time, right now". They were announcing that, for the time being they were closing their doors. In such disorientation, they'd made the call and venues across Pōneke followed suit in the days following.

It's difficult to pin down how exact we felt 'at that time', when the structures of alert levels had yet to be established. Right at the peak of Pōneke summer, the mentality of 'the show must go on' gave way to acceptance that, for the safety of Aotearoa, it should not. It was

(word of the year) unprecedented and tears were shed and ghost lights lit.

In the interim, our familiarity with streaming and video conferences increased tenfold. A day after that statement, a landmark stream from BATS ensured that Hugo Grrrl and A Mulled Whine's *Princess Boy Wonder* could be viewed. Two days later the Fringe streamed its awards, ensuring an end to a turbulent 30th. Theatre has always been about ingenuity and working with what you have and it's telling that even from the lockdown's inception, theatre was adapting, hybridising into the digital space. That's testament to the performers, producers and technicians who made it happen.

The same could be said for the entirety of lockdown which saw experimentation but also a newfound sense of community. Circa Theatre developed *Lockdown Live*, a livestream connecting artists with audiences and *Backstage Pass*, a weekly online event giving audiences a mini documentary into the life of creators.

BATS Happy Hour evoked the comfort of Lumen bar via Zoom, with costume prompts and breakout zones. Tahi Festival developed a huge resource with the zoom industry conversations of *Tahi Mahi* with solo practitioners.

Then there were producers who shared filmed recordings of new works through livestream: Binge Culture's *Break Up* paired Zoom's isolating nature with the end of a relationship; *Feast of Fools* brought clowning into our living room; and Circa commissioned two digital works from artists, Trick of the Light's *It's Behind You* and Te Rēhia's *Found In Translation*, playing ingeniously with livestreaming technology and VOD respectively.



IT WAS (WORD OF THE YEAR) UNPRECEDENTED AND TEARS WERE SHED AND GHOST LIGHTS LIT

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

LEFT: *The Slutcracker* by Jean Sergent and Salesi Le'ota, School for Gifted Children, BATS. Image: Jason Aldous.

Ka-Shue (Letters Home) by Lynda Chanwai-Earle, Tahiti Festival, BATS. Image: Dianna Thomson.

Hole by Lynda Chanwai Earle, WTF! Development Season, Circa Theatre. Image: Philip Merry.

Public Service Announcements: Election 2020 by Thom Adams, Jamie McCaskill and Anya Tate-Manning, Circa Theatre. Image: Roc+ Photography.

Change Your Own Life by Jean Sergent, School for Gifted Children, BATS. Image: Jason Aldous.

Women Beware Women by Thomas Middleton, reconceived by Fiona Samuel, Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School, Te Whaea Theatre. Image: Philip Merry.

ABOVE: *A Traveller's Guide to Turkish Dogs* by Barnaby Olson and company, Circa Theatre. Image: Roc+ Photography.

PREVIOUS PAGE: *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*, a work-in-progress showing of a new musical based on the novella by George Saunders, book by Tim Price, music and lyrics by Bret McKenzie, National Theatre of Great Britain, New Zealand Festival of the Arts, Shed 6. Image: Matt Grace.



With alert levels lowering but capable of changing any day, theatre in Pōneke once again had to pivot and fast. A special shout out to the box office teams who expertly guided patrons through changes and developed checkerboard seating for each respective night. Three shows that had been cancelled had triumphant returns: *The Artist* at Circa, Jean Sergent's *Change Your Own Life* at BATS (performing live and live streamed), and a community production of *Midnight in Moscow* at Gryphon Theatre, written by Dean Parker, who we tragically lost in April.

Driven to create again, the rest of 2020 saw artists deliver thrilling, ambitious and crowd-pleasing entertainment. PSA's biggest production yet, *PSA: Election 2020* saw Circa filled with a tower of trash, while Toi Whakaari's double bill of *Lockdown La Ronde* and *Pre Lockdown Post* dazzled audiences with stylish commentary at BATS. *That's All She Wrote* brought the passion and heart of musical theatre cabaret and *Dungeoning & Dragoning* (both at Circa), the exhilaration and community of DnD. *#UsTwo* at BATS and *Di & Viv & Rose* at Circa highlighted the importance of sisterhood and Circa welcomed children to *The Glitter Garden*, a drag musical extravaganza, the first of its kind in the world. Tahiti Festival returned to BATS with 18 solo shows, showcasing the wealth of talent our industry has to offer and BATS also introduced the Studio Residency, an initiative that allows creators to develop without the pressure of performance.

At the end of the year we had holiday traditions with modern twists, *The Slutcracker* at BATS centred LGBTQ+ artists and narratives in an exuberant and loving adaptation of the ballet and *Cinderella: The Pantomime* at Circa saw Cinderella as her own hero against a backdrop of modern pop songs. *Princess Boy Wonder* returned to BATS and *The Older The Better* at Circa saw 90-year-old veterans of the stage deliver pitch perfect zingers. The Wellington Theatre Awards provided the perfect end, celebrating figures and organisations that served as beacons through the surreal, unprecedented year that was 2020.

Why I read the play I read

ALEX LODGE

on The Willing Horse

Isobel Andrews' dry and often straight-out bitchy one act comedy from 1941, is a portrait within a portrait of a time in Aotearoa's theatrical history. Andrews wrote the all-female piece specifically for her theatre group (The Strathmore Play Readers) to perform at British Drama League festivals that were a regular occurrence in the 1940s.

In its original publication Andrews lays out in wonderfully bossy detail her advice for other groups using the play, explaining that "poor production" of her script is the main reason she dislikes watching her own work. Honestly, these production notes are some of my favourite writing by Andrews – particularly her note on the verisimilitude of the protagonist's sandwich-making during the performance:

"This needs a lot of rehearsing because there should be no pretence about it. [The protagonist] must keep on making sandwiches. She should have her various jars of paste etc. ranged in front of her on the table, and she should solemnly butter and spread and cut until there is a high pile of sandwiches on the table. Use pre-cut loaves. Wasteful? Not at all! When we did it we always had the sandwiches for supper..."

The festival function of the script is the first portrait that Andrews provides – of an era where theatre was primarily a social activity and especially strong in rural regions as a competitive pastime among married unemployed women. Compare this to the majority of today's theatre audiences, living in major city centres, largely upper middle class, bourgeois-bohemian types. The world which Andrews was writing for – where stay at home mothers and their kids would put on shows for each other, often original works performed in community halls for a low entry fee – seems like some utopian dream to me.

Sue Dunlop's 2002 thesis *The Role of Women in the Culture and Context of a Developing New Zealand Theatre 1920 - 1950* includes a thorough history of the theatre context for these festivals, tracing them from the colonisation era in the 1800s through to the theatre community being stratified into amateur versus professional in the 1970s.

Dunlop explains that being involved in a dramatic society for 1930s married women was a kind of occupational therapy – a wife being in work implied that one's husband wasn't earning enough to support the household. Being part of a dramatic society was a socially respectable way to keep busy.



During the 1940s, the focus of people's daily lives shifted to the war effort rather than social routines and community events. But the need for morale boosting events still existed, and women's performance groups cropped up in this time to entertain the troops or perform at fundraisers. One act plays were a preferred format around this time as they could be included in a variety-night line up, as well as being suited to the national British Drama League Festival circuit.

The content of the play itself provides the second portrait of this time, following the behind-the-scenes women's world of a community dance. Set in a town hall (where it would likely have also been performed), *The Willing Horse* follows the titular character of Miss Kate Wilkes. Kate refers to herself as "a willing horse" for the community as the town's go-for, a role she has fallen into as an unmarried woman. Over the course of the play, Kate babysits an infant, manages the logistics of the dance hall setup, agrees to run endless errands for her friends, and makes sure that the local eligible bachelor dances with his sweet neighbour and not the snobby city girl who is visiting. All of this while she conducts, and I quote, "an orgy of sandwich-making".

Andrews gives validation to often invisible domestic labour, and more than that uses comedy to highlight the exploitation of that one friend who everyone assumes has nothing else to do. It's all done with that brisk

SOLEMNLY BUTTER AND SPREAD AND CUT UNTIL THERE IS A HIGH PILE

cheeriness I remember my grandmother and her Salvation Army friends would boss us around the kitchen with. One of the terms of endearment Kate has for the younger woman is calling her a "little idiot" repeatedly to her face, a weird and timeless gag.

The story is wrapped up when Kate realises that the offstage male character Fred has been in love with her the whole time, and she bashfully leaves her sandwiches to join him for a dance. It's perhaps not the perfect feminist-ahead-of-her-time statement, but it's structurally tidy and gives the otherwise episodic narrative a natural conclusion. And it's nice to think of the post-show arguments that it would have provoked among its mostly female audiences. Was Kate better off alone? Is it really the happy-ever-after it seems to be? Or can we admit that her only love interest is kind of a dud and doesn't deserve a formidable woman like Kate? After all, the social function of theatre is always to reflect and disrupt. And Andrews, ever a willing horse, does just that in giving us this portrait of 1940s womanhood with all its flaws in full show.

ABOVE: *The Willing Horse* by Isobel Andrews, Whangarei Fringe Festival, Oneonesix. Image: Hana Meuli-Henare.

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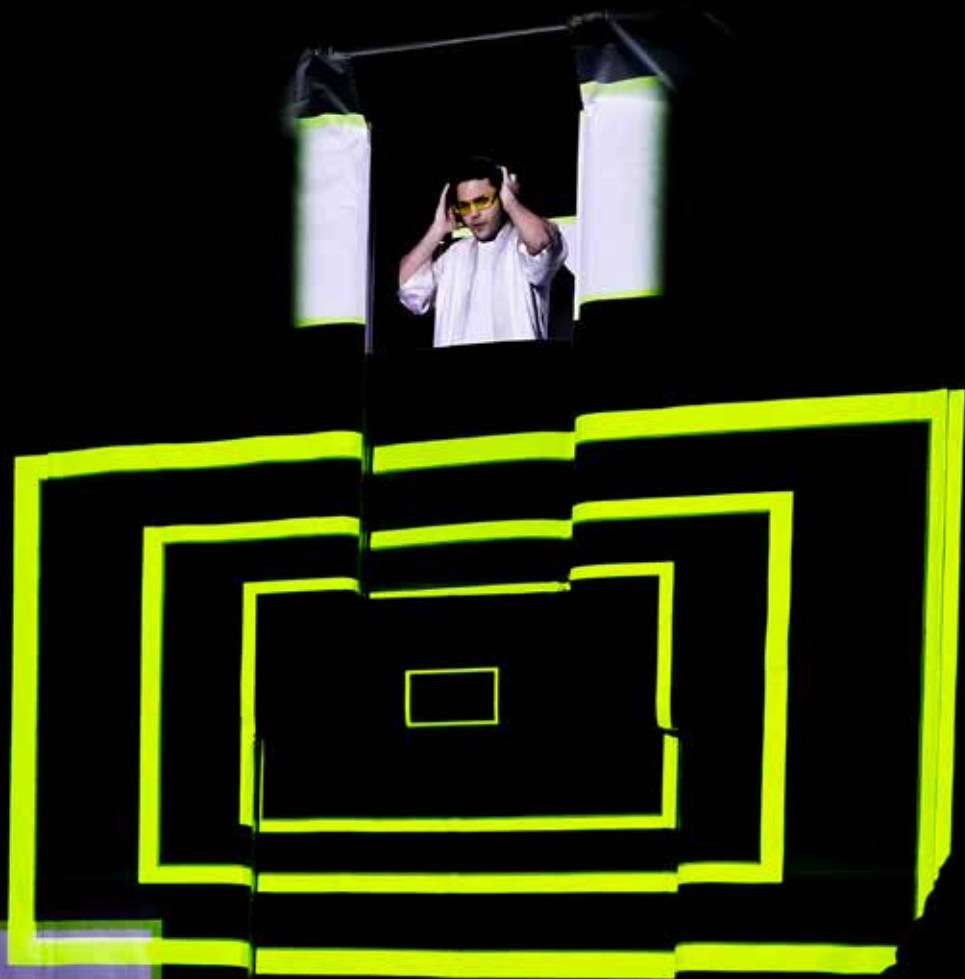
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THE NEW NET GOES FISHING

*Alice Webb-Liddall speaks to Māori theatre producers investing
in telling stories through a digital lens.*



There's no words that accurately describe the state Covid-19 left the world's arts scene in last year. Artists and those surrounding them have worked tirelessly to make their craft sustainable into 2021, with hopes a revitalised marketplace for theatre is emerging like a phoenix from the ashes after the New Year countdown.

For many artists, that hope was out of necessity – something to cling to as tours were cancelled, shows postponed and cities far and wide see-sawed in and out of various lockdown levels. While the pause wasn't entirely welcomed by theatre practitioners, it did provide the chance to re-evaluate the future of the industry. From that pause, a digital form arose, one that had already existed in smaller forms but now has had the chance – or the pressure – to help hold up the industry until theatre doors could open wide once again.

The idea of digital theatre is not a new one. Its inception can't be pinned to the arrival of Covid-19, but for many theatre companies and arts organisations across the globe, going digital was fast-tracked because of the pandemic.

Māori theatre was at the forefront of that transition with creators like Amber Curreen and the team at Te Pou theatre forced to rapidly shift so much of what they had planned, including the digitisation of an entire festival, Te Pou's annual Kōanga festival.

For Mīria George and Hone Kouka, founders of Tawata Productions, digitisation had been part of the conversation for a while. They saw it as a way of not only making their products accessible to wider audiences, but wider groups of creators, too.

"We're Māori, Pacific and Indigenous, we're global by nature so that means it's all about the reach as well, and this is just an enhancement of that," says Kouka. "It wasn't something that because of Covid we thought 'let's go digital,' we were already thinking that way. I see digital as being another sovereign space for us."

Creative New Zealand's Adaptation Fund was

I SEE DIGITAL AS BEING ANOTHER SOVEREIGN SPACE FOR US

announced in 2020 in an effort to help the arts sector stay alive through digital offerings while live performance wasn't possible. Through it, 35 organisations were funded to create projects that would help the arts adapt to the challenges and opportunities presented by Covid-19.

Tawata Productions, Te Pou Theatre and Kouka's 2021 Kia Mau festival were each awarded money under this fund to create and expand their digital outputs. Kouka says the money has helped them rethink the scope of the arts' digital potential – and he can already see that potential for Māori digital arts to change how theatre is perceived.

"You don't have just one way of creating material for online. It doesn't have to be a camera and microphones and just shoot it flat, you can have a whole lot of other different things. That's an investigation that we've been doing, what are the other ways to do this? How do you package it? How do you monetise it? We'll make mistakes so that when independent artists do it they will know. It's another way to create sustainability for our artists."

Awarded just over \$245,000 from the adaptation fund, Te Pou Theatre has been able to attach digital products onto each of the shows in their upcoming programme. When Te Pou's run of *Peter Paka Paratene* was cut because of lockdown last year, a recorded digital version was created – that's the kind of quick-thinking innovation digital theatre allows.

"It helps you to think about what the story is outside of the whole experience of a live theatre show – who is this story speaking to? We can now get it to people outside of Auckland who may not be able to come to the live show," says Curreen.

LEFT: *Pre Lockdown Post* by 2020 Toi Whakaari 3rd Year Acting students directed by Hone Kouka, Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School, BATS. Image: Philip Merry.

The Adaptation fund will allow more opportunity for these digital shows to be created. Curreen says the work they did to digitise the 2020 Kōanga Festival helped them to experiment with the many different ways theatre can be enhanced with these technologies.

As part of the 2020 Kōanga Festival, four plays were produced about te reo Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, under the banner 'Whytangi?'. When organisers made the decision to turn the festival completely digital, the Whytangi? plays were each recorded using different mediums. Curreen explains.

"We had a play with doing a very naturalistic version – that's more just like a filmed live play – keeping the set in one contained area like it's a live set and containing the axis on which the camera is moving... We did one as theatre so it was in a black box theatre space and had a little bit of set so it required you to suspend disbelief. And we did one where we used a camera and turned the show into a puppet show, so we could get really close and tell the story in a completely different way."

She says despite trying all these methods, the objective stayed clear: to not lose the beauty of the words that had been written or the intimacy of theatre, despite not being able to share a physical space.

"It's important to drill down into 'what is the seed of what we're doing? What are the key tenets, the fundamental aspects of what we're doing? What does it actually mean to come together in a digital space?'"

George and Curreen agree while the live show recording format would work for certain pieces, both wanted to carve an unique space for Māori creators that would utilise the innovation that online performance allows.

George says it was just as important to ensure the experience for creatives wasn't lessened by the digital shift – recorded works serve as a physical manifestation of all the mahi that goes into a live performance.

"As live production artists it's not just about that hour and a half you spend in the theatre

with us, [working in the digital space] allows us to share more varied and nuanced experiences of what it is to work in the Māori and Pasifika live performance sector. It creates documentation and ensures that our history is written down. It ensures that our whakapapa in this creative industry is recorded."

For Tawata Productions, digital creativity looks like many things. A web series adapted from a theatre show called *Big Hair Don't Care* is in its final stages of post-production now. It looks like digital assets – recorded versions of their plays, readings and behind-the-scenes editorial – to accompany their live programming. It also looks like more projects along the lines of *Ngā Whakaaro Huritāo*, a programme that invited practitioners to put pen to paper for a digital series of written works.

"What Covid has done is given us time to reflect and document what it is that we do in other ways," says George. "It was so interesting to see how readers picked up on the different articles. We had 20 different artists writing for this series, it was written, not spoken, published online on our website and the uptake locally was huge but our analytics could also pick up that the uptake internationally was really strong as well."

Going digital also means audiences not typically exposed to theatre are able to be – and for rural Māori communities access to theatre has not always been easy. A new, digitised theatre model means there's an opportunity to increase the range of voices in our theatre communities.

Now even in some of the most isolated marae in Aotearoa there's steady internet connections, and digital theatre will mean that isolation doesn't have to be cultural as well as physical. The tikanga of traditional Pākehā theatre houses is another reason George thinks the digital shift could be good for Māori audiences.

"That level of accessibility and being able to enter a space where you're not having to

negotiate foreign tikanga and kawa or etiquette of a very Pākehā theatre house definitely creates a different accessibility for our people.”

And it's not just Māori audiences who will benefit, but Māori actors and theatre practitioners too. Curreen doesn't want Māori to have to leave their papa kāinga in order to be successful in the arts. She's glad more opportunities are arising now to help people carve their way in the industry, no matter where they're doing that from.

“People want to go home. A lot of artists are wanting to go home. I bring in a lot of actors for that Kōanga week and a lot of them are living outside of Tamaki, so while having a workshop online wasn't ideal, it did mean I could have actors from outside the motu,” she explains.

“In the future we can create works, particularly if they're meant to be consumed digitally, that mean people can stay in their papa kāinga. They can stay at home, and they don't need to come to Auckland to get work. That's damaged our people for generations, needing to come to a major city to get work.”

For Kouka, the best thing about digital theatre will be its ability to compliment live performance – which he says will always be the beating heart of the theatre.

“What Covid has confirmed for me is that people want it live. People are so hungry. They want to come together, and digital doesn't mean separate – it's about enhancing the whole experience... The funding just accelerated what we were going to do already.”

That enhanced experience may include things like podcasts and readings – like Kōanga festival's 2020 programme, and it might be filmed productions, but Curreen wants the digital shift to signify a blending of the barriers between theatre, film and other arts.

“Within te ao Pākehā there's always a lot of boxes, a lot of lines. This is arts and this is sport, whereas within te ao Māori this is ngā



ONE OF THE THINGS ABOUT MĀORI THEATRE AND FILM IS THE CONSTANT INNOVATION

mahi a rēhia... I want our emerging makers who are finding their artistic voice, to be making in both spaces and be prolific in both spaces and not feel like they have to take one route or another. I want them to make works that are both live and for screen and be able to navigate those worlds easily so that they can keep telling our stories.”

Digital space is another sovereign space for Māori and Indigenous people, says Kouka, and Māori artists will continue to find ways to innovate in that space in ways that lift up their stories and their communities.

“One of the things about Māori theatre and film is the constant innovation. When you've got limited resources you're constantly innovating. It's us as Māori creators utilising on three or four levels rather than just one. This has to work for me as an artist, for our audience, for our community and for our industry.”

ABOVE: Filming *ID10M* by Antonio Te Maioha, Kōanga Festival, Te Pou Theatre. Image: Te Pou Theatre.

BRINGING IT FORWARD

James Wenley on our theatre archives and the need to bring theatre past to our present and future.

When I was seven and falling in love with theatre, I decided I would keep the programme of every show that I saw. I didn't have the word for it back then, but I think I had grasped that a core pleasure of live theatre is its ephemerality: it exists for a particular moment in time, with no performance ever quite the same. I also realised that long after the shows had come and gone, these programmes could act as a portal to my original experience, conjuring images, sound and emotion associated with the production.

I zealously stuck to my childhood vow, amassing a large (and ever expanding) collection representing my theatregoing. I introduced a sizable sample in my solo *Dr Drama Makes A Show With You*, which debuted under alert level 2 conditions at the Limelight, Aotea Centre for Auckland Fringe 2021. Audience lingered (safely) at the end of the show, examining programmes that had been strung up around them. Multiple portals, theatre shows from the past living again in memory.

How often, as a national theatre culture, do we look through our old programmes? How often do we even *keep* our programmes? We

need only look at the websites of some of our professional theatre venues to see how short-lived the public record can be, production pages culled from the web. Call it the 'what's on next' syndrome: when the onus is to be new, relevant, urgent, we don't always look back.

A strong contemporary theatre culture and practice is one that maintains a critical relationship with its history. An awareness of Aotearoa theatre whakapapa can help ground practitioners with a deeper understanding of what they are doing in their work, why they are doing it, and the larger cultural history they are contributing to. Our theatre history needs to be actively preserved and made accessible. How are we going in bringing Aotearoa's theatre and playwriting history forward?

To answer this, let's cycle back to another time when similar questions were posed at 'A Conference on the Conservation of Records of the Performing Arts', held on 13 October, 1984 at Victoria University of Wellington. I have a record of the day's addresses and discussion thanks to the presence of mind of Peter Beatson, who "kept a tape recorder



WHEN THE ONUS IS TO BE NEW,
RELEVANT, URGENT, WE DON'T
ALWAYS LOOK BACK

running most of the day” and transcribed the material. Nonnita Rees described how Downstage’s records were secured: “it was difficult to sort through... what ought to be kept amongst all those boxes of what looked like rotting rubbish.” Mary Ronnie of Auckland Libraries offered a vision of transferring archives to the then in-development Aotea Centre, which could hold a future museum of New Zealand performing arts. Rosemary Collier, archivist, cautioned against “over-ambitious” ideas for national collections, which could quickly flounder without sustainable funding. It was noted existing theatre archives consisted of what had “fallen off the back of the truck.” What had survived had been archived, but proactive preservation had rarely taken place. Much had already been lost. The attendees agreed there was a pressing need to “raise the consciousness” around the preservation of theatre records.

The conference seeded what would become Pūranga Whakaari o Aotearoa – Theatre Archives New Zealand, a charitable trust founded in 1997, with members including Bill Sheat, John Thomson, David Carnegie, and

Judy Russell. A significant initiative was the TANZ database, a register of professional and community theatre archives held by societies, companies, individuals and repositories such as archives, libraries, museums and historical societies. Since 2020 the database has been hosted on TANZ’s website. There are now over 480 entries in the database, but many gaps remain. You can complete a digital survey via the website to have the details of your collections added to the database. What artefacts of your theatrical activities do you have in boxes (and USB sticks) that might be of interest?

People are a significant archive too, and TANZ also organises oral history interviews. Subjects have included Bernard Esquilant and William Menlove (2003) of the Southern Comedy Players, actor George Henare (2007) and director Susan Wilson (2019). TANZ also offer a practical manual *Caring for your Theatre Archives* available as an e-book.

ABOVE: *Boys* by Eleanor Bishop, adapted from Greg McGee’s *Foreskin’s Lament*, Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School, Te Whaea Theatre. Image: Philip Merry.

TANZ does not hold archives itself, but the database points you towards collections scattered across Aotearoa. Downstage's archive was deposited with the National Library's Alexander Turnbull in Wellington, where Circa's and Playmarket's can also be found. Archivist Seán JD McMahon advises that all donated material is carefully appraised. "Once it has been accessed by the relevant curator the donation is then either returned to the donor if it is out of scope, or accepted into the collection and the process of arrangement, description and housing begins."

In the University of Otago's Hocken Collections you can find the records of the Globe and Fortune theatres and the papers of Robert Lord and Roger Hall, including diaries, correspondence and draft scripts. Auckland Libraries holds the records for many local companies past and present, including Mercury Theatre, Theatre Corporate and the New Independent Theatre as well as over 2000 folders of programmes, posters, flyers and other ephemera from individuals and local and touring companies.

I love the ritual of visiting the archives. Bags to the side or in a locker. Sitting with a pencil and pad at the ready. Folders wheeled out on trolleys. Reading through press clippings, company reports, marked up scripts.

The thrill of finding a handwritten note from your subject – communing across time. The University of Auckland holds the papers of Sally Rodwell and Alan Brunton of Red Mole. It's a sprawling collection – scripts, photographs, even travel brochures from the time overseas. The gold was an audio recording of the NYC performance of *The Last Days of Mankind* in 1979. I felt like a pilgrim, given rare access to the holy relics from this one-of-a-kind collective.

The Auckland Museum's collection includes the records of the New Zealand Puppet Theatre and Stella Jones. Jones was the author of *The Tree*, which debuted in Bristol, UK in 1957 and was one of the few

plays toured by the New Zealand Players set in New Zealand. My favourite archive find remains finding an earlier draft of the play, which featured struckout passages revealing the characters' experiences during World War II (in the published play the war context bubbles as an unspoken subtext). After I wrote on *The Tree* in my MA thesis, it was added to the University of Auckland's second year drama curriculum, restaged and interpreted by new generations of students.

My home institution Victoria University of Wellington holds Bruce Mason's papers, as well as a series of videos of productions recorded at Wellington theatre venues between 1985 and 1996. It's a real treasure trove – 56 in total! – including Hens' Teeth, Pacific Theatre's *Tusitala and the House of Spirits*, and Robert Lord's posthumous *Joyful and Triumphant*. I requested *Nga Tangata Toa* by Hone Kouka, which debuted at Taki Rua in 1994. In attempting to access the recording, I initially found myself cast in an absurdist drama: while the VHS tape could not be removed from the library, the VUW library no longer had a VHS player – illustrating the challenges of maintaining recorded archival material as technologies become obsolete. Eventually I was permitted to leave with the tape, and I connected my TV to a VHS player that had been gathering dust in a cupboard. A red and green splodge appeared on the screen followed by a piercing bleep – but then, to my relief, the cast came into grainy focus, performing waiata as the audience entered. The printed script indicates in the first scene "there is a karanga to welcome the men [returning from serving in WWI] to shore." The text does not do justice to the emotion and action on screen, including a long hongi, not mentioned in the stage directions, between a reunited husband and wife.

Of course, nothing compares to the live experience. We also need to bring texts out of the archives to live a new life on the stage. Our plays often suffer from short life cycles, and revivals of older Aotearoa theatre



work are infrequent. I understand why. We need to keep staging new work to tackle the pressures and anxieties of 21st century Aotearoa. We need new work to give voice and representation to perspectives that have been historically absent or marginalised on both our national and theatre stages. But there is also value in distance – to put up an older work to examine how conversations from the past connect with the present.

There's been a healthy recent trend of re-examining and remixing our theatrical canon: Carl Bland's use of Bruce Mason's plays in *Te Po*, Eleanor Bishop's deconstruction of Greg McGee's *Foreskin's Lament* in *Boys* (performed this year by The Court Youth Company), or Katie Wolfe's verbatim *The Haka Party Incident* incorporating songs from Maranga Mai.

We must also keep front of mind that to enter the archive is to grapple with problematic history, where Pākehā and masculine perspectives have dominated, consolidating representations of the 'norm' onstage. Bruce Mason continues to be revived, but I think the plays of Renée are overdue for a resurgence. What other taonga is waiting in the archive we can give renewed attention to today?

Back at the 1984 conference, David Carnegie

expressed that if the theatre community took steps to preserve "the current wave of creativity we may have a unique opportunity to be in almost at the ground floor... I'm afraid if we let it slip, in thirty years' time we will be kicking ourselves for having missed a unique opportunity." Almost four decades later, we may not be doing any kicking, but his warning remains relevant for new generations. There's been a great effort in the intervening years to maintain theatre history: the TANZ database, Theatre Aotearoa's searchable database of past productions, Te Ara's theatre entries. This very *Playmarket Annual*, which traces its lineage back to Downstage's *Act* in 1967, continues to provide an essential record of theatrical activity in Aotearoa.

But we still need to be more present in our relationship with our past theatre history. Our approach needs to remain proactive – not relying on what falls off the back of a truck or survives a hard drive crash. We must all act to ensure we continue to bring our theatre history with us.

James Wenley is a member of the TANZ trust board.

ABOVE: *The Tree* by Stella Jones, University of Auckland, Drama Studio, 2013. Image: Rina Kim.

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*W Dance Company
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A GREAT PUSH FORWARD

*A remarkable life in the development of theatre and education –
Sunny Amey in conversation with Mark Amery.*

In a *Playmarket Annual* focusing on community theatre, education, theatre history, and of course the New Zealand play all roads at some point lead to Sunny Amey. If 70 years of theatre history were adapted for film Sunny would pop up *Forrest Gump*-like in many seminal scenes, including the birth of Playmarket. Last year she was even back on stage, aged 91, at Circa, charming a new generation in *The Older the Better*. I sat down with her in Paekākāriki to hear about her life in theatre and education between the 1930s and 1970s. The 40 years that have followed need their own separate chapter.

I've always been involved with drama. In the '30s at Seatoun School we read plays from the School Journals. Being a good reader I was always given the lead roles! I did two years at Wellington Teachers' College

1946-47 after the war, and before then we had quite a strong drama group at Wellington East Girls' College. We used to have culture clubs and I was always in the plays, mostly British. I can remember playing the man in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

We had a very strong drama club at Teachers' College too. These clubs met on Thursdays for three hours, which was very progressive. I don't think they do that sort of thing now – students spent three hours a week doing drama or Māori club or art club. There were some very good productions.

In 1948 I trained at Christchurch Teachers' College to be a speech therapist for a year, and in 1951 I went overseas with 20 pounds in my pocket and no return fare. When I was in Britain I went to lots of drama in education courses with some very well known people – that's looking at child drama and how children act. They used to stage drama in



the round because they saw children as acting all around the room. So as adults in these courses we would act in the round ourselves, moving to music, freeing up in the process. So my whole brain in its attitude to drama was freed up.

I couldn't save the money to get back so I was there nearly four years, but towards the end of 1954 I got this invitation to come back and be the junior lecturer in speech and drama at Teachers' College. It was still very liberal.

I had to not only look at the speech of every student in the college, but also operate one of the first reel-to-reel tapes, and I took charge of the drama club. I think I'm right in saying that I introduced the whole idea of improvisation, which is what I had learnt in Britain – making up your own plays, devising is what it's called – into the college and the drama world. One student was Grant Tilly. I taught him all that stuff. There was no devised theatre. There was a woman called Margaret Walker who also came back with improvisation soon after.

I directed the productions. The college had a reputation for doing plays of social significance. I think the first was Thurber and Nugent's *The Male Animal* with Michael Haigh, his first major part. Then, something very unorthodox, *Pinnocchio*

MY WHOLE BRAIN IN ITS ATTITUDE TO DRAMA WAS FREED UP

ABOVE: Sunny Amey directing
*Six Characters in Search of an
Author*, Wellington Teachers'
College Drama Club 1957.



THERE WAS SOME RESENTMENT ABOUT THAT - ME, BEING A WOMAN

ABOVE: Sunny and Coral Trimmer in *The Older the Better*, Hen's Teeth, Circa Theatre, 2020. Image: Stephen A'Court.

which this brilliant man Brian Way in England had introduced me to, done in the round.

Through doing the plays I thought it was something I'd like to do on a more permanent basis. At that time the New Zealand Players was the only professional theatre company in the country, otherwise it was all amateur – very good amateur theatre, much better than in Britain. So I applied and got a small government bursary to go to Britain in 1959 so I could learn about directing.

There were no schools for directing at that time but I was very interested in the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, which was the writers' theatre and the avant-garde. So I went to see the man running it, George Devine, puffing away on his pipe, and asked if I could observe.

I was lucky, he only saw me because Richard Campion (who formed NZ Players) had been a student of his with Edith Campion at the Old Vic Theatre School, and had given me a letter. He said, "Well it's no good sitting and observing, we've got a position for an assistant stage manager, would you do that?" I was 28 at that time. God, would I! And I never looked back.

All the writers were at the theatre then – John Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Pinter – and they would be sitting in the theatre at rehearsals, and then going away and rewriting right up until production. When I came back to New Zealand, to direct Downstage, a more conventional theatre, that experience led me by the second or third year to programme six or so new New Zealand plays out of the ten.

At the Royal Court they did Sunday night productions where people got to try out new plays. I tried very hard to get one of these, because I'd gone through to being an assistant director, but I never got one because women never got productions then. They'd given one to one woman and it hadn't worked well...

So, in the end I left and went to weekly rep where I did get productions. You'd do them in a week. Then the actors would get another play the next Tuesday – I don't know how they did it. I was in one once – I couldn't learn the bloody script!

It was the Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury. My first was Wesker's *Roots* and I only got it because I'd worked for three months on all Wesker's plays at the Royal Court as assistant to John Dexter. I was allowed ten days, which was miraculous! But mostly in those days the women directors got all the leftovers...

Then the Chichester Theatre was being formed, a theatre in the round which was very unusual, and those of us who'd worked well together at the Royal Court were invited. I was the Production Assistant. I was what was called 'Little Miss Fix It' around all the departments. Then from there Sir Laurence [Olivier] was asked to establish the National Theatre and, again, those of us who had worked well were invited to that. We were the nucleus of the first company.

To begin with I was one of three assistant directors, working in turn with each director and doing whatever they wanted you to do. You did rehearse the understudies, which was interesting because that's where I rehearsed raw people like Michael Gambon in his 20s and

lots of people who have grown up and become *Sirs* and *Ladies*. A very interesting time. And then later on I became assistant to Sir Laurence and the Repertory Manager, working with all these famous people who were quite ordinary really – easy to be with, not at all pompous. That was an experience in itself.

We were all so overworked. I can remember Maggie Smith for example at one point had to perform a matinee at Chichester and then fly up to do something else at the Old Vic. It was crazy. Sir Laurence was very proud that we would do six different productions in a week. I did that for about five years until 1968.

But before I had gone to the National I had done an audition for the BBC. Six years later I got in touch and they said I could come and do training to be a director. But I loathed every minute of it. The BBC was mainly that big round building in London and I felt like an ant going into it. After my training it was very hard to get a job and people said "Oh you've got to go and drink in the canteen, there you'll meet people". But being a Kiwi I was like "I'm not going to have drinks somewhere to get a job!" I did do one 30 minute theatre for television.

Then I was invited back to run Downstage at the Star Boating Club in 1970. The Hannah Playhouse was going up. I had come out here briefly in 1968, exhausted after working at the National for five years, and Downstage had been established in the old coffee shop where the Hannah is now. They were serving meals, which was extraordinary, first in the world really. Horrible meal! George and Pat Laking said to me, "It's usually better than this" but I loved it! To be in a little room with people bubbling away... so when I was asked I thought this was great, a chance to give something back for my bursary. I had *no* intention of staying in New Zealand, I had this little house in London, I only intended to stay two years but then, at the end of my first year – because the Hannah was being built – they asked me to stay longer.

New Zealand was so lively, so get up and go in the early '70s. The arts had flourished,

THREE NEW PLAYS₂₀₂₁



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by Katie Wolfe

// THINGS THAT MATTER

by Gary Henderson | adapted from the memoir by Dr David Galler

// YANG/YOUNG/杨

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Image: The Haka Party Incident by Katie Wolfe | Credit: Andi Crown

**AUCKLAND
THEATRE
COMPANY**

pottery had come into this wild existence... But I was a year in New Zealand before I got used to it – I was walking so fast and the place was so slow! I'd ask for something for the theatre and they'd say "We're expecting a shipment in two months time". But when they asked me to stay I thought this was a marvellous country, and I thought 'I don't want to go home and be poor in London.' So I came to settle in New Zealand. Best decision I ever made.

When we moved into the Hannah, I decided to direct a Shakespeare because I'd never directed one. I wanted to do *Much Ado About Nothing*, but the committee thought it wasn't a good title for their theatre opening you see, so I said 'Oh, alright, I'll do *As You Like It!*' I wanted a witty title. But Max Richards objected, he said a new theatre should be opening with a new New Zealand play. I'd been there at the opening of a few theatres – The National, the Chichester, and I said "You don't take the risk of opening a brand new theatre with an unknown play". I don't think he ever forgave me.

When I worked at Downstage Nonnita Rees and Philip Mann were there and Robert Lord was stage managing and writing a few plays. I think it was from that combination of personalities and a need for support for playwrights that Playmarket evolved. Because writers needed someone. And that's what helped bring the writers up, I'm sure of it.

We did some New Zealand plays but it was that one year, 1974 [when we did mostly New Zealand works]. I was there 1970 to 1975 and I was the first woman to do it and – one of the reasons I came back – one of the first New Zealanders. There was some resentment about that – me, being a woman. I wasn't really aware of it at the beginning – I might have been a bit bossier, a bit more severe then. Certainly I had real discipline from the theatre in Britain, so there were certain things I insisted on. I did become

much freer in my directing and I'm *really* interested in cooperative work, including cooperative directing, which can be done.

While I was at Downstage Grant Tilly came to me and said "We've got a group of actors who think the actors should be running this theatre", a cooperative. I said 'Grant, I don't think you can do that', because we had about 5000 members then, paying \$30 a year, and it is an establishment theatre... and he got the pip with me. Hardly spoke to me after that. He could be very moody but he was very talented. So anyway I said 'if you really believe that you could make work an actors' cooperative theatre you need to go and do it. I never thought they would make a cooperative theatre work, and when they did I never thought it would last more than a year. I think it's wonderful Circa has lasted.

We had a theatre-in-schools group and it did some good work in schools. Then when I was leaving Downstage, Bill Renwick with whom I had worked at teachers' college was Director of Education and they decided to form an education officer for drama, which was forward looking. We used to travel all over the country. I established some quite big groups of teachers to teach drama, both as a form of learning and developing plays at both primary and secondary. I had courses going all the time. I guess with that department job I was able to combine both my education and theatre knowledge.

The developing of teachers in that area was my major role really. We act out things all the time, and to get children to communicate through drama is one of the best possible ways for them to learn really. Dorothy Heathcote came out from Britain, a bit of an eccentric. The film she made *Three Looms Waiting* [Editor: available on Youtube] about how she put children into drama roles was a revelation. We went with her and a large group of teachers around schools in the country for a month. She was extraordinary and gave us a big push forward.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
LEFT: *Random Acts of Art*,
Wow! Productions and
Theatreworks Ltd, Dunedin.
Image: Craig McNaughton.
Dear Boobs On Stage, Suitcase
Theatre, Regent Theatre.
Image: Nick Beadle. *The End
of the Golden Weather* by Bruce
Mason, Wow! Productions,
Dunedin. Image: Martyn
Roberts. The whanau of the
National Māori Theatre Hui,
Puketeraki Marae, Karitane.
Image: Juanita Hepi.

HEPETEMA 9-19

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ŌTEPOTI 2020

BY EMILY DUNCAN

The year kicked off in community-centred spirit with Summer Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In hindsight, the faith in an outdoors production was a portentous bellwether of what was to come with Covid.

The first to rise triumphantly from the lockdown ashes in September was Suitcase Theatre's *Dear Boobs*, originally scheduled for Fringe. Directed and adapted by Laura Wells, *Dear Boobs* is based on the 2018 book compiled by breast cancer survivor Emily Searle. The season shifted to the Regent's main stage playing to sell-out audiences and raising almost \$3500 supporting breast cancer communities.

Arcade Theatre Company presented a season of works at the Mary Hopewell Theatre: *Dayboy* by Harrison Kennedy and Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit* directed by Shaun Swain. Working within level 2, *Dayboy* was performed to a limited, invited audience, but has since had a full season in Fringe 2021.

Ōtepoti Theatre Lab's Playwrights Programme returned for its second year, pairing Alison Cowan (*Passing Through*) with dramaturg Allison Horsley, Tunui Wano (*Street Lights*) with Erina Daniels, and Meg Parry-Hartigan (*The Many Deaths of Jeff Goldblum*) with Victor Rodger. Following a 10-week development process, rehearsed readings were staged in September to capacity audiences at the Swan Café. 2019 ŌTL playwright Isaac Martyn developed *Partially Furnished* into full-length, produced by AI Productions at Allen Hall in October.

In direct response to Covid, Cindy Diver launched a series of performance events, *RAA (Random Acts of Art)* in August in co-production with Wow! These were free varied

multi-disciplinary pieces – often interactive, surprising, and always uplifting – staged around the CBD. *RAA* reminded us all to stay kind, whilst engaging approximately 60 artists.

Wow! had planned a June run of *The End of the Golden Weather*. Instead, a first-half version was taken into schools for NCEA exams in September. Following this, a radically – but no less impressive – pared-back production toured the full script in November. Directed by Lisa Warrington, Matt Wilson performed at local halls in Dunedin, Waitati, and Oamaru to capacity houses. The production and koha admission were possible due to the flexible commitment of the team and support from Creative NZ and Otago Community Trust.

West-End hit *Di and Viv and Rose* (Fusion Productions) saw the return of more standard traditional theatre fare and title-role actors Lara Macgregor, Jodie Dorday, and Julie Edwards stomping and dancing the Mayfair boards in November. Originally to have premiered in Dunedin, the first season was at Circa Theatre, Wellington where it was one of the first full professional productions in Aotearoa post-lockdown. Significantly the biennial National Māori Theatre Hui was held for the first time in Ōtepoti at Puketeraki Marae. Jessica Latton (Ake Ake Theatre Company) and Katrina Chandra led the planning, along with Matua John Broughton, Fran Kewene and Julie Edwards. As the year turned from the challenges of Covid, it was more than fitting that the hui was based around the kaupapa of 'activating space' and a programme anchored in hauora.

Why I read the play I read

SAM BROOKS

on Jason Drowning

When reading the work of any queer playwright born before their time – or, if I’m being honest – my time, I can’t help but wonder the work that could have been. With limitation comes creativity, sure! It means a writer can dress their text up in metaphor and allegory like a drag queen getting ready for their 11pm slot at the club. It gives the generations that follow endless fodder to examine and reinterpret a text.

Those limitations are also armour, though. Metaphor is plausible deniability, allegory is a command to ‘look over there!’ Armour protects you, but it also holds you down. It locks you into place. A writer’s tools become their anchor, and as a writer with the relative freedom to write anything, I can love the art while still pining for the artist and how they had to bend to tell the stories they wanted to tell. There is no denying the brilliance of Williams, of Albee, of Fornés, but both the little queer boy inside of me and the angry queer man outside of me wonders how much more they could have done if they would have allowed to... simply be?

I think about this a lot reading the work of Gordon Dryland. I’ll be frank: I was unfamiliar with Dryland’s work. My only encounter was a mention in Shane Bosher’s ‘Firing the Canon’

from last year’s *Playmarket Annual*, where he quoted from Dryland’s unashamedly queer, strikingly progressive play, *If I Bought Her The Wool*; the title being an answer to the statement: “My mother made me a homosexual”. Dryland’s absence from my learning, and from the canon, is an indictment on how bad we are at looking back at our theatre history in general. How can we learn from something that isn’t recorded?

Dryland’s heyday was before homosexuality was even legal in this country. While his work was on a few mainstages in the ‘70s and he picked up both critical and commercial success, he found it increasingly difficult to be programmed, and moved to Sydney for more opportunities. Tale as old as time.

Jason Drowning seems shockingly dark, even for the time: Jason is a 60-year-old man who has recently been recovered from a lake after nearly drowning – although he insists that he actually *did* drown. Over two acts, he has tense, slightly absurdist banter with his long-suffering wife Freda – her character notes literally say ‘determined not to sympathise’ – and his brittle, darkly funny daughter Jennifer.

It becomes clear, before long, that Jason intended to kill himself, and it’s not the first



time. The second half of the play takes an even darker turn when his family more or less shrug at his suicidal tendencies. His daughter's response? "Are we to entertain him by the hour until he's dead?" Even darker, is his wife's: "So get over it or get it over with."

There's also something quintessentially queer about Jason's suicidal despair. The last scene in the play opens with a lengthy, gorgeously wrought monologue where he attempts to describe the feeling of not just nearly drowning, but *actually* drowning to his family:

"I understood perfectly what was happening but I am at a loss to describe exactly what I felt. I was plunged into a terrifying abyss of remorse and guilt and shame – a horror beyond even your most desperate imagination. A minute part of me – the seed of my being – the basic atom of my existence – took panic and tried to wrench me from it."

I can't read *Jason Drowning* without thinking as a sort of foggy mirror. Me, as a queer man looking back. Dryland, as a queer man looking straight down the barrel. Jason's despair isn't just coded as queer, it seems to be screaming queer. He's a man who, after 60 years of living what appears to be a lie, would rather drown than be a drowned man breathing.

JASON'S DESPAIR ISN'T JUST CODED AS QUEER, IT SEEMS TO BE SCREAMING QUEER

It leads me to the question that makes me roll my eyes whenever it's thrown at me: If a work by a queer playwright doesn't tackle queer lives or queer issues, is it part of the queer canon? It's a ludicrous question, implying sexuality is something that can be opted in or out of. A queer playwright views the world through that lens, as well as the lens of any other parts of their identity that intersect with that – race, class, gender. It's a question that only exists to delegitimise.

Queerness can be expressed in many ways now – beautiful, ugly, vibrant, boring as hell. As a queer playwright, everything I write is queer. Reading the work of Gordon Dryland, a trailblazer for a path lightly walked, makes me grateful that I don't have to gird my writing devices like armour. They can be weapons, wielded ferociously, or they can be tools, poised to mend and to heal.

ABOVE: *Jason Drowning* by Gordon Dryland, New Independent Theatre, 1981. Image: Ian Thomas.



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TE RAUKURA
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ŌTAUTAHĪ 2020

BY NATHAN JOE

Amidst the threat of the pandemic and social distancing Christchurch continued to develop its growing independent theatre scene while restructuring its mainstage productions.

Perhaps unsurprising from a city that has been defined by its resilience, plenty of hope was still present on its stages. The city's two primary venues, The Court Theatre and Little Andromeda held down the fort admirably during this time, operating at a level matching any other live performance venue across the country.

New artistic director of The Court, Dan Pengelly had a tricky first year on the job, with the complete upheaval of the planned 2020 season. If a silver lining was to be found, it made space for more local works from across the country, a makeshift mini-celebration. This included *Rants in the Dark* (previously at Circa), the NZ debut of Modern Māori Quartet's *Two Worlds*, Penny Ashton's *Promise and Promiscuity* and James Roque's *Boy Mestizo* in its Christchurch debut.

The Court Youth Company's productions *Quarantine Diaries* and *Jekyll and Hyde* continued to develop the city's future theatremaking ecology. The necessity of this programme can't be stressed enough, ensuring fresh blood is being pumped into the city's veins.

Significantly Little Andromeda built a more permanent theatre and has a 10 year lease, which should finally give independent theatre more security here and audience development. Previously established shows finally got their Christchurch premiere there including Leon Wadham's *Giddy*, Ralph McCubbin Howell's *Tröll*, Liam Coleman's *Play*, Abby Howells' *Harlequeen* and David Huggins' *Once More*,

ENSURING FRESH BLOOD IS BEING PUMPED INTO THE CITY'S VEINS

with *Feeling*. Not to mention *Snort on Tour*, a homecoming for a lot of Christchurch-born theatremakers cum comedians. Emerging and local makers who also benefited from the new space included several NASDA graduates in *Demon Cat Space Boy* (supported by Two Productions) and Blackboard Collective's *Isolation Mixtape Premiere*.

Director of Little Andromeda Michael Bell deserves an honourable mention: for implementing retro couches (replacing traditional seating blocks) as cabaret-style seating, with table service using QR codes during alert level 2.

The city's theatre has since returned to some semblance of normalcy. The 2020 year was bookended by The Court's annual summer musical, filling the city with the tunes from *Jersey Boys*. Over at Little Andromeda there was another bookend, annual Christmas show, *Christ! What a Night* – a Thomas Sainsbury and Chris Parker original – which also popped off. If audiences were full of trepidation about attending shows, you wouldn't have guessed it, with bums on seats selling out the show far in advance.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Gladys and Alfie* by Jane McLauchlan, Lyttelton Arts Factory. Image: Sabin Holloway. *Treasure Island* by David Ladderman and Lizzie Tollemache, Rollicking Entertainment, Christchurch Botanic Gardens. Image: Erik Norder. *Rants in the Dark* by Emily Writes adapted for the stage by Mel Dodge, Lyndee-Jane Rutherford and Bevin Linkhorn, Good Times, The Court Theatre. Image: Roc+ Photography.

CLASSROOM DRAMAS

Kate Powell gets an assessment on what needs to happen with drama in schools, and its impact on our theatre.

When you step back and survey the rich topography of Aotearoa's theatrescape in 2021, it's hard to believe that 60 years ago (with the New Zealand Players come and gone) we had no professional theatres.

If you get out your binoculars and peer into the distance, you'll see the peaks and valleys of moments, traditions and ideologies that have ebbed and flowed to shape our storytelling. Colonialism. Shedding our cultural cringe. The Māori Renaissance. Multiculturalism. It's a landscape pockmarked with pain and othering amidst pockets of change.

By no means are we there yet. But what is evident is that our theatrescape is perpetually evolving, shifting and reassessing the ground it finds itself on. We are on an upward incline; a survey by Playmarket in 2019 found that of the 205 works professionally produced, 82% of the stories were homegrown.

How this landscape will be shaped depends majorly on the knowledge and interests of the generation tending to it. That means how drama is being taught in our schools is vital to establishing a future of theatre that is truly diverse, and supported by audiences.

Given the changes Covid-19 has made globally, it's timely to pause and consider how drama is taught in schools.

Some of our most experienced practitioners in this area provided me with their thoughts.

Prof. Peter O'Connor

An expert in applied theatre, champion of the role the arts can play in healing after trauma, and currently a major advocate for better treatment of the arts in our education system Professor Peter O'Connor works out of the University of Auckland's Faculty of Education and Social Work and is the Director of the Centre for Arts and Social Transformation.

O'Connor describes "the teaching in, through and about theatre in New Zealand schools as 'haphazard' – in that the quality and quantity of what happens in a school is largely dependent on the passion and interest of individual teachers/principals."

As an NCEA subject, he observes that drama "has attracted some professional development for teachers, lifted its status within the curriculum and meant there is growing academic surety about its teaching." Drama



IF IT'S HAPHAZARD AT SECONDARY...
IT'S ALMOST NON-EXISTENT AT PRIMARY

at secondary NCEA level, like all the other subjects, is currently under review. "We develop understanding, knowledge and skills by building on what we have learnt before" O'Connor continues. So: "The problem in schools is that often students come to drama later in schooling with little to build on. If it's haphazard at secondary except for some strikingly good examples and the brave efforts of the subject association through their 'Networks of Excellence', it's almost non-existent at primary."

The lack of drama classes in primary is concerning to O'Connor. "Because we do not train primary teachers to teach drama it might be better for it to die than kill enthusiasm for drama by having it taught badly... The arts and drama in particular have been starved from New Zealand schools, the end result is that young people do not gather the skills, knowledge and understanding of how to tell their stories."

For O'Connor, a ramification is that "we fail to give them the tools to make sense of their real worlds through fiction. Schooling is so driven by the functional, by preparing children to take up low paid jobs in a fragile and

precarious economic system, that the beauty of literature or film or theatre and story is almost completely ignored."

Nick Meissel

A 2016 Kiwibank Local Hero, Meissel is a performing arts teacher who has been fostering vibrant theatre scenes from Westland to Central Otago for over 13 years.

He believes that "most teachers bring elements of drama to their work, especially in primary settings. [But] many primary schools don't have experienced drama teachers that feel confident enough to develop it further into bigger events." For Meissel, "empowering teachers to feel confident in taking that next step" is an important focus.

When asked how the current curriculum is impacting the stories being currently created in Aotearoa's theatres, Meissel responds "It's hard to say I certainly don't believe there is enough of Aotearoa on stage at this point in time. I was lucky enough to witness a performance

ABOVE: *Who Wants to be 100? (Anyone Who's 99)*
by Roger Hall, John Paul II High School, Greymouth.
Image: Merv Ellis.



by No.3 Roskill Theatre a couple of weeks ago [a company building the artistic and cultural capital of Mount Roskill youth]. This was a powerful and thought-provoking performance that reflected us. It's groups such as this that need nurturing and space in our theatres!"

Meissel is keen to stress the importance of having locally written stories in the school curriculum. "I firmly believe that students have better connection to plays that are produced locally" he says.

"There are a huge number of young playwrights writing about their lives and experiences in our country and this has stronger connections to our youth than a lot of other plays. Our theatre has the power to give us insight and reflection on our past" Meissel continues. "Students learning about our history and our stories through theatre are more likely to engage in learning about our whakapapa. To be a part of something physically takes on a greater relevance."

Meissel would like to see "funding for a public archive that gives access to playwrights' life stories and their works. Playwrights in schools – having a playwright

come into schools and workshop their plays for performance. I'd love to see more of Aotearoa on stage in our theatres. More New Zealand theatre on stage will help to develop an expectation from our audiences."

Susan Battye

When asked to describe the perfect marriage between our drama curriculum and plays to shape our theatre landscape, founding president of Drama New Zealand, writer, playwright and teacher Susan Battye says she believes it needs a closer relationship established between Drama New Zealand, the Ministry of Education, the National Qualifications Authority, Creative New Zealand, Drama teacher training institutions "and, of course, Playmarket".

"The lack of visibility of drama related government spokespeople is unlikely to produce a good result for either teachers or their students when it comes to enhancing drama as a subject in the curriculum. Meanwhile drama teachers will do their best to endure the situation, but many will fall by the wayside, not due to lack of enthusiasm but due to a lack of support from above."

Of the current curriculum: "While drama as a medium for learning across the curriculum

ABOVE: *The Pohutukawa Tree* by Bruce Mason, John Paul II High School, Greymouth. Image: Merv Ellis.

(with concepts like Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert) remains unrecognised as a pedagogy by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, this methodology – which incorporates aspects of the arts curriculum – increases in popularity among teachers and principals, because it works.”

“Ironically, the level of understanding and use of drama as an art form in primary schooling suffers simply because the preservice training is so woeful and teachers lack confidence to teach it as a result. There is also no consistency of preservice teacher training for secondary drama teachers, with novices and experienced teachers alike relying heavily on the subject association, Drama New Zealand, for advice and guidance about vital aspects of their work i.e. curriculum and assessment requirements, methodologies and access to a realistic departmental budget to support the performance of plays that require licensing.”

“The subject association has to ‘negotiate’ on behalf of its members with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and the Ministry of Education regarding any changes to NCEA, including specifics – such as what playwrights might be studied. There is a lack of transparency in all of this. There is zero recognition in the current environment that many of our drama students will ultimately seek work in New Zealand’s highly sophisticated, billion dollar, theatre, film and television industry.”

Battye has been doing her bit to ensure the place of Aotearoa’s plays in our drama curriculum, publishing plays and corresponding resources. “I thought [they] would enable both beginning and experienced drama teachers to ‘get a result’ in the classroom by meeting drama curriculum and assessment requirements, including NCEA standards. In terms of the wider curriculum, my plays reflect themes in English, social studies and even science. Schools are free to utilise this connection by working across the curriculum.”



Emma Bishop

Current Drama NZ President Emma Bishop echoes her colleagues; sentiments when asked to describe the current system, saying that “the current system is pretty lacking in the arts.”

While she says those that have come through NCEA often have a knowledge of devising, “plays written in Aotearoa have a place only if the teachers give them a place. Currently there is a playwrights list – New Zealand playwrights feature on it – however there is no compulsory element to have to study them. For many teachers Aotearoa theatre can be confusing as there are so many subcategories with differing features and vocabulary etc. The new draft matrix for NCEA, along with the new Aotearoa histories curriculum, will hopefully see a compulsory element of Aotearoa voice and therefore an increase in Aotearoa theatre on the stage.”

Bishop believes that the perfect marriage between our drama curriculum and plays written in Aotearoa requires more “visibility,

ABOVE: *Badjelly the Witch* adapted by Alannah O’Sullivan from the book by Spike Milligan, Burnside High School, Christchurch. Image: Adam Hodgson.

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Snake and Lizard

The Owl and the Pussy-Cat

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Lori Dungey (*A Lion in the Meadow*
and *Other Stories* by Margaret Mahy)

Tim Bray Theatre Company

Photo by David Rowland/One-Image.com

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knowledge, training, and understanding of what's available and how to access it... for some schools with no drama budget putting on theatre is hard as there is no budget for purchasing scripts or paying royalties. Some teachers are not even aware of Playmarket membership."

Bishop would like to see more information provided alongside plays: an "understanding of the history or influence on the writing of the play and its content [along with] more access to playwrights." She reasons that "teachers are always going to teach what they know and are confident with."

Kerry Lynch

Playwright and drama teacher Kerry Lynch believes that for the curriculum to become a real meeting point between schools and theatres, more investment is needed in creating full time arts education positions at the established theatres.

Lynch likes the fact that NCEA is not highly prescriptive. "Drama teachers are able to teach to their strengths and select texts that they know their students will respond to. This is essential for teachers to develop their own pedagogy and teaching style. The prioritising of credits over learning remains the biggest

concern with data culture now being deeply embedded in most secondary schools. In my school, teachers rarely discuss curriculum – assessment remains the tail that wags the dog."

Over the last thirty years, Lynch notes "there's been a steady increase in the number of drama teachers using New Zealand texts in their classrooms. I expect the reasons why are varied, NCEA has definitely made a difference due to there being a number of achievement standards that are text focused. I also think that our younger teachers in particular are more open to selecting New Zealand content for their students. The advocacy work by Playmarket and our subject association Drama New Zealand will also have played a key part in this ongoing progression."

"One demographic or tribe that is definitely underrepresented in our archives are teenagers. The canon of plays that teachers often use are adult plays with adult themes, this is perhaps due to there being a small body of outstanding teenage plays. New Zealand youth deserve to see more teenage stories in our schools so that their view of this complex world is validated."

ABOVE: *Dream On* by Sarah Delahunty, Nayland College, Nelson. Image: Lucy Buckley.

THEATRE CALENDAR 2020

Professional Productions of Aotearoa Plays 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020.

TOURING & INTERNATIONAL

Conversations avec mon Pénis
Dean Hewison
Théâtre Bistouri
Touring Quebec, Canada
16 Aug 2019 – 7 Mar 2020

Only Bones 1.0
Thom Monckton and Gemma Tweedie
Kallo Collective
Winterfest Salzburg, Austria
11 Dec 2019 – 6 Jan 2020
Auckland Fringe
1 – 2 Mar 2020

Wild Dogs Under My Skirt
Tusiata Avia FCC
Soho Playhouse,
New York, USA
3 – 18 Jan

Two Worlds
The Modern Māori Quartet
Soho Playhouse,
New York USA 9 – 18 Jan
Reset 2020 5 – 6 Nov

Black Ties
John Harvey and
Tainui Tukiwaho
Ilbjerri Theatre Company
and Te Rēhia Theatre
Company
Sydney Festival, Perth
Festival, NZ Festival,
Auckland Arts Festival
10 Jan – 15 Mar

The Contours of Heaven
Ana Chaya Scotney,
Marama Beamish and
Puti Lancaster
Soho Playhouse
New York, USA
11 – 13 Jan

A Traveller's Guide to Turkish Dogs
Barnaby Olson and
Company, Circa
17 Jan – 8 Feb,
Hawke's Bay Arts Festival
14 Oct

Cinderella
Amanda Stone
The Pantaloons
Globe Theatre,
Carterton Events Centre
18 – 19 Jan

Box of Birds
Birdlife Productions
Nelson Tasman Tour
21 Jan – 1 Mar

Mrs Krishnan's Party
Justin Lewis and
Jacob Rajan
Indian Ink Theatre
Company
Virginia, Iowa, Hawai'i
2 Feb – 9 Mar

Ghost Trees
Gary Stalker
Plumb Productions
Lopdell House, Artworks,
Q Theatre Auckland
Fringe and Oneonesix
Whangārei
30 Jan – 29 Feb,
Tahi Festival BATS
24 Oct

Be Longing
Lauren Gibson
Vault Festival London UK
4 – 8 Feb

Play
Liam Coleman
Gawky Productions
Q Theatre Auckland Pride
4 – 15 Feb,

BATS
3 – 12 Sep,
Little Andromeda
27 – 28 Nov

Oldest Friend
David Osborne
Crossfade Productions
Garnet Station,
Lake House Arts,
The Pumphouse
5 – 20 Feb

Stupid Bitch Wants a Puppy
Claire Waldron
Six Degrees Festival
BATS 11 – 15 Feb,
Auckland Fringe
1 – 3 Mar

I'll Tell You This for Nothing: My Mother the War Hero
Kate JasonSmith
Adelaide Fringe,
Bateman's Bay Australia
14 Feb – 6 Mar

Promise and Promiscuity
Penny Ashton
Adelaide Fringe
14 – 27 Feb 2020,
Toitoti Hastings,
The Court Theatre
15 – 22 Aug,
Circa Theatre
12 – 29 Nov

Transhulance
Ania Upstill
Butch Mermaid
Productions
Adelaide Fringe,
NZ Fringe
15 Feb – 12 Mar

Hudson and Halls Live!
Kip Chapman with

Todd Emerson and
Sophie Roberts
Gay and Lesbian Mardi
Gras Festival, Sydney
18 – 19 Feb

Working On My Night Moves
Julia Croft and
Nisha Madhan
The Yard Theatre,
London, UK
18 – 22 Feb

Dr Drama Makes a Show
James Wenley
Auckland Fringe,
NZ Fringe 18 Feb – 3 Mar

Two Hearts: World Tour
Laura Daniel and Joseph
Moore
Hamilton Gardens Arts
Festival 20 Feb, Hawke's
Bay Arts Festival 20 Oct,
Reset 2020
New Plymouth 12 Nov

This Fragile Planet
NZ Dance Company and
The Conch
Auckland Fringe,
Hamilton Gardens Arts
Festival 25 Feb – 1 Mar

#ustwo
Catherine and Sarah
Delahunty
Auckland Fringe,
NZ Fringe
25 Feb – 9 Mar, BATS
13 – 17 Oct

The Grin Reaper
Julia and Tessa Clement
Auckland Fringe 26 – 28
Feb, Fringe in the Stings,
Whangārei Fringe
8 – 18 Oct

Shot Bro

Rob Mokaraka
Mookalucky Productions
Melbourne
2 – 5 Mar,
Touring NZ
9 Sep – 18 Dec

Harlequeen

Abby Howells
Harlequeen Productions
and Arcade Theatre
Company
Adelaide Fringe Festival
3 – 8 Mar,
Little Andromeda
Christchurch
6 – 7 Nov

Over My Dead Body:

Little Black Bitch
Jason Te Mete
Tuatara Collective
Mangere Arts Centre,
TAPAC, Artworks
Waiheke, Oneonesix
Whangārei 3 – 19 Mar

Tröll

Ralph McCubbin Howell
Trick of the Light
Little Andromeda
5 – 7 Mar, Te Tairāwhiti
Arts Festival Gisborne,
The Meteor, Hamilton,
Carterton Events Centre,
Reset 2020 04 Oct – 7 Nov

Elevator

Stew Productions
J&M Fast Food 7 – 15
Mar, BATS 24 Sep – 3 Oct

Ngā Manu Rōreka

Apirana Taylor translated
into te reo Māori Materoa
Haenga, Taki Rua
National tour
9 – 20 Mar,
20 Jul – 18 Sep

The Artist

Thom Monckton
and Circo Aereo
Adelaide Festival
9 – 14 Mar,
Circa Theatre
24 – 27 Jun

The Look of Love

Ali Harper
Alicat Productions
Theatre Royal Nelson

14 Mar, Ashburton Event
Centre 19 Mar,
The Piano Christchurch
17 – 19 Dec

Sorry For Your Loss

Cian Gardner
Circa Theatre
16 – 20 Mar,
Meteor 20 Jun

Front Yard Festival

Te Pou Theatre
Auckland, Manawatu,
Taranaki, Bay of Plenty
tour 20 May – 10 Jul,
Auckland 15 – 17 Sep

MAMIL

Gregory Cooper
Theatre Royal Nelson,
Toitoti Hastings, Sky City
Auckland 19 Jun – 24
Jul, Clarence St Theatre
Hamilton, Harbourside
Wellington 2 – 2 Oct

Messy Magic Adventure:

Kitchen Chaos
David Ladderman and
Lizzie Tollemache
Rollicking Entertainment
Arts on Tour National Tour
4 – 25 Jul

Puss in Boots

Amanda Stone
The Pantoloons
BATS, Carterton Events
Centre 15 – 19 Jul

The Daylight Atheist

Tom Scott
Arts on Tour national tour
20 Jul – 25 Aug

Cringe Worthy

devised Andrea Saunders
The Beat Girls
Centrepoint 4 – 26 Sep,
Reset 2020
New Plymouth 5 – 7 Nov

Greedy Cat

Joy Cowley, adapted
Tim Bray, songs
Christine White
Tim Bray Theatre
Company
Pumphouse, Mangere
Arts Centre, Vodafone
Event Centre Manukau
19 Sep – 5 Nov

Before Karma Gets Us

Tess Sullivan, Ariaana
Osborne and Olivia
Parker, Basement
Theatre, Hawke's Bay
Arts Festival
22 Sep – 17 Oct

Turn on the Light

Peter Wilson and
Kenny King
Little Dog Barking
Globe Theatre Palmerston
North, Epunui Community
Hall, Tahī Festival BATS
30 Sep – 24 Oct

Te Moana Glow Show

Sarah Burren and
Midge Perez
National Tour
30 Sep – 28 Nov

Super Hugh-Man

Rutene Spooner
Te Tairāwhiti Arts Festival
Reset 2020
2 Oct – 8 Nov

What's Wrong with

Glenda Gumball?
Hullabaloo Children's Arts
Festival,
Whangārei Fringe
6 – 24 Oct

Magic in the Bush

Kylie Penn
Hullabaloo Children's
Arts Festival, Whangārei
Fringe 7 – 13 Oct

The Pope

Anthony McCarten
Alpha Square
Strovolos Municipal
Theatre, Cyprus
19 Sept – 2 Oct

*Tūranga: The Land of Milk
and Honey*

Rongowhakaata Iwi Trust
Te Tairāwhiti Arts Festival
Lawson Field Theatre,
Te Papa Tongarewa
9 – 19 Oct

Olive Copperbottom

Penny Ashton
Theatre Royal Nelson,
ASB Theatre Blenheim,
The Meteor
10 – 22 Oct

The Lost Letter Office

Jen McArthur and Renata
Hopkins
Capital E National Theatre
for Children National Tour
10 Oct – 10 Dec

One of Those

David Charteris
Tahī Festival BATS,
Sarjeant Gallery
Whanganui 21 – 25 Oct

Play Play

Cubbin Theatre Company
Isaac Theatre Royal
Christchurch, Auckland
Live 7 – 22 Nov

TĀMAKI MAKĀURAU**Auckland Theatre Company***Winding Up*

Roger Hall
ASB Waterfront Theatre,
Clarence Street Theatre
Hamilton, Toitoti
11 Feb – 22 Mar,
TSB Showplace
New Plymouth,
Baycourt Tauranga
28 Oct – 2 Nov

Black Lover

Stanley Makuwe
Q Theatre 6 Mar – 18 Mar,
ASB Waterfront Theatre
9 – 13 Sep, Hawke's Bay
Arts Festival 21 Oct,
Reset 2020 12 – 13 Nov

Chekhov's The Seagull

Eli Kent and
Eleanor Bishop
Online from 8 May

The Master Builder

Henrik Ibsen, a new
version Colin McCall
Online from 8 Aug

Still Life with Chickens

D.F. Mamea
ASB Waterfront Theatre
9 – 13 Sep

48 Nights on Hope Street

Leki Jackson-Bourke,
Nathan Joe, Freya Daly
Sadgrove, Ana Scotney
and Cian Elyse White
ASB Waterfront Theatre
16 – 20 Sep



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New Plays in the past Year:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| ∂ Captain Corelli's mandolin | ∂ Lockdown in Little Grimley |
| ∂ Puffs | ∂ She Kills Monsters |
| ∂ The Lovely Bones | ∂ Tiny Beautiful Things |
| ∂ The Girl on the train | ∂ Birthday's Past, Birthdays Present |
| ∂ Mad Sisters | ∂ Dracula – the bloody truth |
| ∂ Marvel Spotlight Plays | 'The Mousetrap' rights available for 70 th anniversary |

The cultural heart of Hawke's Bay



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toitōi

Hawke's Bay Arts & Events Centre

Basement Theatre

Perfect Shade
Sarita Das
11 – 15 Feb

Year of the Tiger
(虎—hù) Alice
Canton
White_mess
10 – 17 Mar

Essays in Love
adapted Eli Kent
and Oliver Driver
from the novel Alain
de Botton
10 – 19 Mar

My Ode to South
Auckland
Bubbah
22 – 26 Sep

Neon Bootleg
Moe Laga
6 – 10 Oct

Goddamn Fancy
Man
James Nokise
8 – 10 Oct

Heatwave
Grace Augustine
13 – 17 Oct

Our Modern Earth
(Is a F*cking Mess)
Amber Liberté
20 – 24 Oct

Nohopuku
Turongo Collective
27 – 30 Oct

Fake News
The Actors' Program
4 – 14 Nov

Fresh Choice
Jason Te Mete
Tuatara Collective
10 – 14 Nov 2020

Le Basement
XXXmas Cabaret
Kura Forrester and
Hayley Sproull
19 Nov – 19 Dec

Auckland Live

Provocation
Aroha Awarau
12 – 15 Feb

Call it a Night
Carl Bland
Nightson and
Theatre Live Online
20 Sep

Monarch
Katie Burson and
Beth Kayes
7 – 8 Nov

Garage Party
Modern Māori
Quartet
2 – 12 Dec

Auckland Fringe

25 February – 7 March

Alone Luke
Thornborough,
Brainstorm created
Ned Glasier,
Emily Lim and
Company Three,
Browns Bay

Intermediate Class
of '05 devised
the cast, *Burning*
Opinion Suli Moa,
Carnicus Rex Stray
Theatre Company,
Deep Hayden J.
Weal, *Game Face*

Lucy Park, Katie
Paterson and
Lexi Clare, *Get*
Out of my Letter
Box Katie Burson
and Beth Kayes,
Have You Ever
Been with an Asian
Womxn? Gemishka
Chetty and Aiwa
Poomorn, *I Did*
it My Way Deb
Fuller, *I Know What*
I'm Doing Melody
Rachel, *Let me*
Tell you about
Auckland Anders

Falstie-Jensen and
the Hobson Street
Theatre Company,
Lunar State Lunar
Collaborative,
No Holds Bard
Natalie Medlock,
Dan Musgrove
and Michael Hurst,
Perry Tom Clarke,

Tampocalypse
Embers Collective,
The Incredible and
Glorious World
According to the
Fitzroys Charlotte
Nightingale,
The Wall Babel
Theatre, *Two*
Unlikely Heroes
Regan Taylor,
Salomé Grace,
Phil Middleton,
The Doll's House
Katherine Mansfield

Other Venues

Tāmaki Makaurau

Odd Daphne
Josh Iosefo
The Odd Family
Mangere Arts
Centre
12 – 15 Feb

Upu
curated Grace
Taylor
Silo Theatre and
Auckland Arts
Festival
Q Theatre
5 – 15 Mar

Babble
Massive Company
and Auckland Arts
Festival
Mangere Arts
Centre
18 – 19 Mar

Over My Dead
Body: With These
Hands
Jason Te Mete
Tuatara Collective
Artworks Waiheke
15 – 18 Jul

Te Haerenga o Hoiho
Tainui Tukiwaho
Te Rēhia Theatre
Te Pou Theatre
online 21 Sep

Sunflowers
Sierra Southam
Blackbird Lost
Productions
The Pumphouse
30 Sep – 4 Oct

Paradise or the
Impermanence of
Ice Cream
Jacob Rajan and
Justin Lewis
Indian Ink Theatre
Company
TAPAC
23 Oct – 1 Nov

Sunrise
Joshua Downs,
Anya Christiansen,
James Hunter and
Francis Johnson
Seed Theatre
Company
Pitt St Theatre
23 – 31 Oct

Back to
Square One?
Anders Falstie-
Jensen
The Rebel Alliance
Apple Orchard Way
27 Oct

Faithful
Geoff Allen
Galatea Theatre
Pitt St Theatre
4 – 14 Nov

KIRIKIRIROA

Meteor Theatre

Destination Earth
Courteney Mayall
6 – 11 Jul

Hood Street:
The Musical
words and music
Kyle Chuen, Nick
Braae, Courteney
Mayall and Nick
Wilkinson
Hood Street Fishing
Club 25 Jul

Unearthed
Spoken Word
Chronicles
5 – 7 Nov

Hush
Talking House
Carving in Ice
Theatre
25 – 28 Nov

Hamilton Gardens

Arts Festival

26 Feb – 1 Mar

Chick'n a Box
Phil Ormsby
and Alex Ellis,
Morningstar
Albert Belz, *Old,*
Bold and Going
Nowhere K-M
Adams, *Romeo*
and *Juliet* and *Viola*
Apocalypse Lounge
and Tahi Ta'i Tasi,
Sofija's Garden
Renee Liang

TE PAPAIOEA

Centrepoin Theatre

and Dark Room

Te Manawa Takeover
Centrepoin
Basement Company
Te Manawa
24 – 27 Jun

24 Hour Challenge
Penny Ashton,
Neenah Dekkers-
Reihana, David
Geary, Miria George,
Briar Grace-Smith,
Pip Hall, Roger Hall,
Jamie McCaskill,
Lucy Schmidt and
Victor Rodger online
7 Apr – 31 May

The Basement
Company Virtual
Extravaganza
Centrepoin
Basement Company
online 20 May

Pure and Deep
Toa Fraser
Simple Truth Theatre
31 Jul – 2 Aug

Bathtime Bubbles:
A Messy Magic
Adventure Lizzie
Tollemache and
David Ladderman
29 Sep – 10 Oct

Basement
Variety Hour
Lizzie Tollemache
13 – 17 Oct

Ladies Night Stephen Sinclair and Anthony McCarten
14 Nov – 19 Dec

Other venues Te Papaioea

Up Down Girl
based on *Up Down Boy*
Sue Shields
Globe Theatre
28 Feb – 1 Mar

A Collection of Noises
Alexander Sparrow
Sparrow and Boyle
Square Edge
8 – 12 December

TE MATAU-A-MĀUI (HAWKES BAY) AND TAIRĀWHITI

Grand Opening
Barbarian Productions
Toitō Hastings
6 – 8 Mar

Period
Amy Atkins
Ephemeral Theatre
Napier Little Theatre
31 Aug – 2 Sep

Witi's Wāhine
Nancy Brunning
Hāpai Productions
Te Tairāwhiti
Arts Festival
2 – 3 Oct

The Séance of Elizabeth
Rose Carpenter
Ali Beal and Lynda Corner
Agents of Chaos
Toitō Fringe in the Stings
10 Oct

Hawke's Bay Arts Festival 12 – 26 Oct

Transfigured Night
Lemi Ponifasio,
As the Day Draws In
Teresa Woodham and
Puti Lancaster,
The Perfect Gift
Renee and Justin Haiu

TE WHANGANUI-A-TARA

Circa Theatre

Alice in Wonderland
Simon Leary and
Gavin Rutherford
2 Jan – 11 Jan

The Surprise Party
Dave Armstrong
18 Jan – 15 Feb

Wonderful
Dean Parker
Armstrong Creative
12 Feb – 7 Mar

Mr Red Light
Carl Bland
Nightsong
4 – 8 Mar

Strasbourg 1518
Lucy Marinkovich and
Lucien Johnson
Borderline Arts Ensemble
13 Mar

It's Behind You
Ralph McCubbin-Howell
and Anya Tate-Manning
Online 28 May

Found in Translation
Tainui Tukiwaho
Online 16 Jul

*The Road That
Wasn't There*
Ralph McCubbin Howell
Trick of the Light Theatre
22 Jul – 1 Aug

*Dungeoning and
Dragoning*
Canvas Abyss
26 Jul – 9 Aug

PSA: Election 2020
Thorn Adams,
Jamie McCaskill and
Anya Tate-Manning
21 Aug – 12 Sep

The Glitter Garden
George Fowler and
Lori Leigh
30 Sep – 10 Oct

*Cinderella –
The Pantomime*
Simon Leary and
Gavin Rutherford
14 Nov – 20 Dec

The Older the Better
Hen's Teeth
3 – 20 Dec

BATS

Exes
Eli Matthewson and
Brynley Stent
28 Jan – 1 Feb

Six Degrees Festival 30 Jan – 15 Feb

Sarah Glenn Ashworth
and Eliza Sanders,
Hush Julian Sewell,
The Party Hannah Clarke,
Timothy Fraser, Austin
Harrison and Emma
Rattenbury, *Fracture*
Jacob Cleghorn,
The Extinction Paradox
Max Nunes-Cesar,
Dance Me to the End
Carrie Thiel

Change Your Own Life
Jean Sergeant
School for Gifted Children
10 – 16 Mar,
online 12 Jun, 24 Oct

Princess Boy Wonder
George Fowler
17 – 20 Mar,
20 Mar (online),
24 – 28 Nov

Pre Lockdown Post
3rd year Acting
Students
Toi Whakaari:
NZ Drama School
15 – 26 Aug

Lockdown La Ronde
Victor Rodger
Toi Whakaari:
NZ Drama School
15 – 26 Aug

The Euthanasia Debate
Jan Bolwell with
Annie Ruth
online from 29 Aug

Rapunzel
Freya Daly Sadgrove
Theatre Live Online and
A Slightly Isolated Dog
29 Aug

*Waste Not Want Not:
Bethany's Guide to the
Thrift Life*
Bethany Taylor
8 Oct

Talofa Papa
Kasiano Mita
8 Oct

Tahi Festival 20 – 24 Oct

A Rare Bird Elisabeth
Easther, *Batch* various,
Fish Saw Sachie Mikawa,
Hey, Piano Bar Lady Linn
Lorkin, *Ka-Shue* Lynda
Chanwai-Earle, *Solitude*
Martine Baanvinger, Yes
Yes Yes Eleanor Bishop
and Karin McCracken

I Know What I'm Doing
Melody Rachel
27 – 31 Oct

The Witching Hours
Uther Dean, Jonny Potts,
Abby Howells, Eamonn
Mara and Emilie Hope
A Mulled Whine and
My Accomplice
27 – 31 Oct

*Routine Magic/Magic
Routine*
Frances Steinberg
5 – 14 Nov

Girl in the Loft
Katherine Wyeth
5 – 14 Nov

The Slutcracker
Jean Sergeant and
Salesi Le'ota
School for Gifted Children
24 Nov – 12 Dec

NZ Fringe Festival 28 Feb – 21 Mar

A Night Out with the Boys
Oboys, *Another Day in
Paradise* Kirstin Crowe,
*Declarations of Love (and
Other Useless Things)*
Emma Maguire, *Deep and
Meaningful* Alayne Dick,
Dinner Eli Payne, *Dr
Barry Roberts Health
and Wellness Summit/
Program (Guide):
"Ascending the New
You", Fatal Fame*
*Dripping Bottle, From
Topp to Bottom, Girlz
on Drug\$* Straight Edge
Productions, *Hay in the
Needle Stack* Waka Maori

Inc, *I'm Walken Here*
Jon Coddington and
Hannah Clarke, *Inquiet*
Moments Campbell
Wright, *Insert Title Here*
Tatjana T, *Legend* Moana
Ete, Courtney Rose
Brown, Sepelini Mua'au
and Dominic Flanagan,
Lita Lucy Dawber, *Luke*
Scott's Little Theatre of
Big Dreams Catriona
Tipene and Ryan Cundy,
Maramataka curated
Neenah Dekkers-Reihana,
Mary Bumby's Hive
of a Story Tanya Batt,
Paloma and the Do of
Death Tom Tuke, *Puberty:*
The Musical Wellington
Young Actors, *Radical*
Youth! Dylan Hutton,
Saltwater Bath Duct
Taped On, *Should've*
Said No Tyler Clarke and
Prea Millar, *Stepping*
Up Daniel Nodder, *Ten*
and Two-Thirds (Years)
Hard Sleeper Theatre
Collective, *The Ballad of*
Paragon Station Hester
Ulliyart, *The Best Show*
in Town is at Your Place
Every Night Jonny Potts,
Waiting for Shark Week
Stevie Hancox-Monk,
Lori Leigh, Maggie Leigh
White, Pippa Drakeford
and Sarah Bergbusch,
Why Me? Georgia Kellett
with Jeremy Hunt and
Bella Petrie

Other Venues Te Whanganui-a-Tara

Snowbright and the
Oopsie Woopsies
Geraldine Brophy
Next Stage Theatre
Moera Community Hall
20 – 25 Jan

The Swing
Helen Pearce Otene
Te Rākau o te Wao
Tapu Trust
Massey University
Drama Lab
7 – 9 Feb

Jerusalem
Lemi Ponifasio

MAU and NZ Festival
Opera House
22 – 23 Feb

Small Town
Michael Lloyd and
Shona Jaunas
Circle of Fifths
Te Raukura ki Kāpiti
15 – 17 Jul

Thumbelina
Rachel Henry
Kidzstuff Theatre
Tararua Tramping Club
26 Sep – 9 Oct

Rapunzel
Amanda Stone
The Pantoloons
Gryphon Theatre
6 – 10 Oct

Women Beware Women
reconceived
Fiona Samuel
Toi Whakaari:
NZ Drama School
Te Whaea Theatre
22 – 31 Oct

Other Venues North Island

8 Scott Ave – *The Musical*
Jack Grace
The Blue Baths, Rotorua
12 – 22 Feb

The Animals
Company of Giants
Nga Purapura Kao
7 March

Owls do Cry
Red Leap Theatre from
the novel Janet Frame
Oneonesix Whangārei
12 – 13 Mar

The Willing Horse
Isobel Andrews
Oneonesix
20 – 22 Oct, 3 Dec

Jekyll and Hyde
A Slightly Isolated Dog
Reset 2020,
New Plymouth
14 – 15 Nov

Whangārei Fringe 10 – 26 Oct

Sass Chocolate Bliss
Balls, *She + They* Willow

and Ren, *Blame it on the*
Ball Neil Troost, *Waiting*
Shadon Meredith

ŌTAUTAHĪ

The Court Theatre

Crash Bash: What's the
Rush? Kathleen Burns
Court Education Tour
10 Feb – 24 Mar

The Quarantine Diaries
devised The Court Youth
Company
1 – 4 Jul

Up Close and Personal
Ali Harper and
Tom Rainey
5 – 8 Aug

Rants in the Dark
Mel Dodge, Lyndee-Jane
Rutherford &
Bevin Linkhorn
26 Sept – 3 Oct

Boy Mestizo
James Roque
24 Oct

Reginald Merton's Final
Curtain Brendon Bennetts
31 Oct

Little Andromeda

Giddy
Leon Wadham
28 – 29 Feb

Goldfish Girl
Ella Hope-Higginson
Theatre Live Online
9 Aug

It's Christmas, duh
Ocean Denham
5 Dec

Christ! What a Night
Tom Sainsbury and
Chris Parker
10 – 19 Dec

Other venues Ōtautahi

Gladys and Alfie
Jane McLauchlan
Lyttelton Arts Factory
17 – 25 Jan

Frickin Dangerous
Bro 2020
Jamaine Ross,

James Roque and
Pax Assadi
Bread and Circus
24 Jan – 2 Feb

Treasure Island
David Ladderman and
Lizzie Tollemache
Rollicking Entertainment
Botanic Gardens
29 Jan – 16 Feb

Cinderella
Gregory Cooper
Isaac Theatre Royal
15 – 20 Dec

ŌTĒPOTI

The Passion of the
[Redacted]
Kerry Lane
Sacilege Productions
University Bookshop
12 – 14 Mar

The End of the Golden
Weather
Bruce Mason
WOW! Productions
Schools Tour, Dunedin
7 – 11 Sep,
Dunedin/Oamaru Tour
5 – 15 Nov

Dayboy Harrison Kennedy
Arcade Theatre Company
Mary Hopewell Theatre
18 – 19 Sep

Partially Furnished
Isaac Martyn
A.I Productions
Allen Hall Theatre
22 – 24 Oct

Other venues South Island

Moon Tales
Birdlife Productions
Nelson Provincial
Museum
18 Jan

The Bicycle and the
Butcher's Daughter
Helen Moulder and
Sue Rider
Willow Productions
Shopfront Theatre,
Nelson
16 Jul – 30 Aug
Sep 10 – Oct 4

PLAYMARKET INFORMATION

Playmarket issues and manages performance licences and royalty payments, circulates clients' plays in Aotearoa and internationally, advises on and negotiates commissions, translation and collaboration agreements, and maintains an archive of playwrights' work.

Playmarket offers a raft of development resources such as clinics, readings, and events; and industry discourse, partnerships and networks. Our bookshop provides every published Aotearoa play in print and has a comprehensive catalogue of unpublished plays to download or purchase.

Playmarket also offers advice to all Aotearoa playwrights, theatremakers and producers.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Professional performance licenses issued: 23

Community performance licenses issued: 54

International licenses issued: 6

School/tertiary performance licenses issued: 107

Scripts circulated: 6767

Scripts/drafts received: 522

Paid script assessments: 11

PUBLISHING

NZ Play Series

Purapurawhetū Briar Grace-Smith

Series Editor: David O'Donnell

Design: Cansino & Co | Editing and

Production: Whitireia Publishing

The Pink Hammer Michele Amas and *Flagons and Foxtrots* Alison Quigan and Ross

Gumbley | Series 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

eBulletin

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

edBulletin

Published biannually via email. Resources and opportunities for teachers and educators | Editor: Salesi Le'ota

AWARDS, COMPETITIONS AND PROJECTS

Bruce Mason Award Winner:

Emily Duncan

Adam NZ Play Award Winner:

This Particular Room Jess Sayer

Runner Up:

Blocked Siobhan Rosenthal

Best Play a Māori Playwright:

Second to God Sarah Browne

Best Play a Pasifika Playwright:

Scholars Tanya Muagututi'a

Best Play a Woman Playwright:

This Particular Room Jess Sayer

McNaughton South Island Play Award:

An Unlikely Season Carl Nixon

Playwrights b4 25 Winner:

Homemade Takeaways Ben Wilson



Playmarket Plays for the Young Competition:

The Glitter Garden George Fowler and Lori Leigh (3 – 8 year olds), *The Ferocious Animals* Petting Zoo Dan Bain (8 – 12 year olds), *Justice is Blind* Helen Vivienne-Fletcher (teenager)

Brown Ink Development Programme:

Is This What You Want to See? Tui Maletau-Doherty, *We Are Many* DF Mamea

Asian Ink Development Programme:

Pork and Poll Taxes Talia Pua

He Pia Māori Kaihāpai Tuhinga: Erina Daniels

Scotland Residency with Playwrights'

Studio Scotland, Magnetic North and CNZ: Uther Dean

Te Hono/Connector: Grace Bentley-Tsibuah

and Miriama McDowell, Mike Hudson and Margaret-Mary Hollins and Philippa Campbell, Ben Hutchison and Gary Henderson, Alex Lodge and Hilary Beaton, Poata Alvie McKree and Dione Joseph-Kouratoras, Suli Moa and Gary Henderson, Joni Nelson and Ahilan Karunaharan, Siobhan Rosenthal and Ralph McCubbin Howell, Ankita Singh and Nathan Joe, Renaye Tamati and Shane Bosher

Rebecca Mason Executive Coaching:

Courtney Rose Brown, Finnius Teppett

Playwrights in Schools programme with

Read NZ Te Pou Muramura:

Dave Armstrong, Leki Jackson-Bourke, Amanaki Prescott-Faletau, Hone Kouka

Robert Lord Writers' Cottage Residencies:

John Forde, Elena de Roo, Sandra Arnold, Rebecca Hawkes, Di Batchelor, Eric Trump

CLINICS, SCRIPT ADVISORY, READINGS AND WORKSHOPS

Same Difference Roanna Dalziel, *Box* Richard Finn, *The Glitter Garden* George Fowler and Lori Leigh, *Game* Vanessa Gray, *I Didn't Really Think it Would be Like This* Abby Howells, *Rocket* Emile Hope, *Cinderella – The Pantomime* Simon Leary and Gavin Rutherford, *As The Day Draws In* Puti Lancaster and Teresa Woodham, *The Sword and the Gown* Rex McGregor, *An Unlikely Season* Carl Nixon, *S.L.A.M (The Secret Lives of Ambitious Minors)* Emma Rattenbury, *Three Calls of the Tui* Michaela Simpson, *The Beak of the Bird* Apirana Taylor, *Mate* Regan Taylor, *Rupture* Craig Thaine, *World* Elspeth Tilley, *Homemade Takeaways* Ben Wilson, *The Bees at the End of the World* Amy Wright, PAT Fresh off the Page, Atawhai Festival.

Te Tira Tā Mai o te Upoko:

Fortnightly Wellington playwriting group facilitated by Jamie McCaskill

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PREVIOUS PAGE: *The Pope* by Anthony McCarten, Alpha Square, Teatro Dentre, Nicosia, Cyprus.
Image: Nicos Mylonas.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Emily Duncan; Mitch Tawhi Thomas, Jonty Hendry and Carrie Green; Sam Brooks and Odessa Owens; Colin McColl and Briar Grace-Smith; Jamie McCaskill; Stuart Hoar and Ross Gumbley; Alison Quigan and Nonnita Rees. Playmarket Accolades 2020, BATS. Images: Philip Merry.



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THE LAST WORD

Joe Musaphia with advice from a playwright still writing after 60 years.

I have this brilliant idea for a worldwide smash hit play. All I need is a beginning, a middle, and an end. And a title. Theatre companies, directors, actors and agents are nowhere in sight. No one drapes a sympathetic arm over my shoulders and whispers, "Hang in there Joe, you're a national treasure."

It's worse when I finish a script and suffer a bout of post-natal depression. Will my baby be healthy? Be heard? Have I given birth to a complete waste of time?

I have never used drugs or alcohol as a cure. But I can understand those who do. Me? I conquer the current bout of post-natal depression by moving onto my next baby-in-waiting.

I blame the trials and tribulations of being a playwright on the fact that I'm besotted with it. For sixty years I have been betrothed to playwrighting till death us do part.

There are two reasons I can't give it up.

One, what else can I do? Two, I don't want to do anything else. If you snuck my laptop away I'd sit staring into space like a dummy. As my mate Roger Hall says, "They will find me face down on my keyboard."

Of course no one forced me into becoming a playwright and actor. Sixty years ago I was a commercial artist and cartoonist for *The*

Listener. I saw John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and dared to think I could write like that. So I wrote a play called *Free* about three aimless Kiwis in a flat. I wrote it with a ballpoint pen. A friend typed it for me. I sent it to Richard Campion at the New Zealand Players. He phoned to say he would produce it as part of a double bill with James K. Baxter's *Three Women and the Sea*. I put the phone down and hollered, "I'm a playwright!"

It took me ten years to get another play, *Victims*, onstage. During that time it was me, and only me, who told me, "do it." I wrote a lot for radio. The only source of income for a playwright between the demise of the New Zealand Players and the birth of Downstage.

Which brings me to my driving force. Money. Adam Macaulay, onetime head of Radio NZ Drama, described me as a playwright who treats it as a job. My words are tools. Rehearsals a workshop. The play merchandise. The stage a showroom. The audience customers. The greatest playwright of them all was a successful businessman, with one eye on the stage and the other on the box office.

Okay. I'm a wanker. But that's a strength. Muhammad Ali hollered, 'I am the greatest!' We might dispute that. He didn't. It kept him going and it keeps me going.

Wankery is a DIY anti-depressant I've been on for 60 years. It hasn't cost me a cent. Doctor Johnson said: "A man is a blockhead who writes for anything else but money."

A wanker yes, a blockhead no.

When there comes the day theatre companies, directors, actors, agent and me do actually get together over one of my scripts, I'm in heaven on earth. Except for the sabotage committed by some actors and directors. I refer to those not attuned to my sense of humour, which is the heart and soul of my work.

I'm uncomfortable with actors who can memorise, enunciate and project my dialogue, but contribute no humour themselves. Humour – particularly the ability to laugh at yourself – has to be in your genes. The ability to add a flick, a flourish to my work is divine. I can't do what I saw one director do when he screamed at an actor, "You will be funny!" There are no laughs in a shattered actor.

I have no say in the casts of my plays. I choose the words, not the mouths. So I clench my teeth, bite my tongue and stiffen my upper lip. In short, shut my mouth in case I wreck the show. Still, who the hell do I think I am? A writer and performer who has made audiences laugh for sixty years thinks he knows what's funny? To lose a precious laugh that is there for the taking ain't funny.

I leave casting to the director. So I can be disappointed and surprised. Downstage produced *Victims* in the '70s. I wrote one character as an obsequious wimp. They cast Ian Watkin in the role. Over six feet, broad, imposing, he was the complete opposite of what I had imagined. He was brilliant as the smallest big man I have ever seen on a stage.

The late Antony Groser directed my most successful play *Mothers and Fathers*. As I was also acting in it with the late Ray Henwood, he gave both of us the same advice. "Play it straight, but keep in the back of your mind it's a comedy." Right on.



IF YOU SNUCK MY LAPTOP AWAY I'D SIT STARING INTO SPACE LIKE A DUMMY

Theatre critics have neither helped nor hindered me. When my first play *Free* appeared with Baxter's I couldn't wait for the reviews. The 'experts' were going to rate Joe Musaphia as a playwright! The first review I read said, 'Musaphia should take lessons in stagecraft from Baxter.' The next review I read. 'Baxter should take lessons in stagecraft from Musaphia.'

So to all you playwrights out there, chin up, head down, and have fun. Advice from a playwright who is still at it after 60 years? Believe in yourself. Especially when others don't.

ABOVE: Joe Musaphia and Jacqui Dunn in *Mothers and Fathers* by Joe Musaphia, Downstage, 1975.
Image: Terence Taylor.

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