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ORIGIN STORY

Ten years of ONEONESIX

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How to write a great Kiwi musical

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No 61
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PROGRESS IS THE ACTIVITY OF TODAY

ISSUE *No 61*

"We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

BARACK OBAMA

Recently I was sitting in the theatre, waiting for the opening night performance of Vela Manusaute's *Sons of Vao* to begin, co-directed by my old drama school chum Anapela Polata'ivao. As I waited, my mind leapt back a good two decades. I'd also been at the opening night of *Taro King*, one of Vela's early works, in the now long-gone Musgrove Studio, with its modest seating capacity of 104. Now, here we all were, about to eagerly encounter the first Niuean play in the 675-seat ASB Waterfront Theatre.

It was a moment brought about through a playwright doing the hard graft, developing his craft year on year; the tireless efforts of a community of artists advocating for necessary change; and programming leadership from artistic directors. Progress has been made and our audiences are the beneficiaries of this groundwork.

2025 saw the presentation of much vital storytelling from our playwrights. Last year 85% of the work on our professional stages was

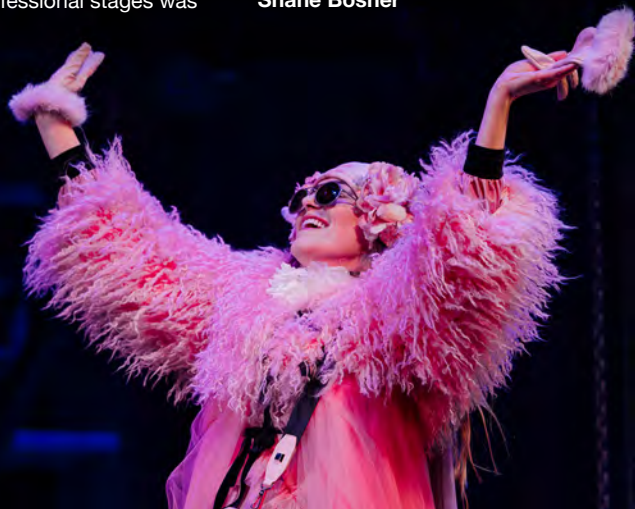
Aotearoa-born; 31% of the scripted works were written by Māori, a record high. Our stages are no longer all about Stoppard and Hare.

Testing, nudging, discovering. These pages are full of possibilities uncovered, progress made and provocations yet to be answered. Jason Te Kare celebrates ten years of regional powerhouse ONEONESIX and its intrepid leader, Laurel Devenie. Sameena Zehra and Claire Hiria Dunning tackle two difficult-to-unpack topics: content advisories and AI. Three generations of playwrights take stock of the present moment, and we reflect on the development and programming of new musicals.

Then, perfectly placed at the end, Stacey Leilua foregrounds meaningful repeating artistic relationships, with – you guessed it – Vela Manusaute and Anapela Polata'ivao.

Dive in.

Shane Boshier



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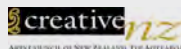
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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Ophelia Thinks Harder* by Jean Betts, Fingerless Theatre, KXT on Broadway, Sydney, Australia. Image: Phil Erbacher.

Sugar by Ro Bright, Bullet Heart Collective, Melbourne Fringe Festival. Image: James Reiser.

Feilding Market Fiasco by Alison Quigan, Centrepont Theatre. Image: Ben Pryor Photography.

ration the Queen's veges by Te Wehi Ratana and Tainui Tukiwaho, Te Pou Theatre, Auckland Arts Festival. Image: Andi Crown Photography.

Monster of the Week by Leo Gene Peters, Dan Goodwin, Nathan Joe and Jane Yonge, ATC Youth Company, Basement Theatre. Image: Andi Crown Photography.

COVER IMAGE: Members of the ONEONESIX whānau: Ngāriki Ngatae, Lutz Hamm and Laurel Devenie. Image: Nimmy Santhosh.

PREVIOUS PAGE: *Mary: The Birth of Frankenstein* by Jess Sayer, Auckland Theatre Company, ASB Waterfront Theatre. Image: Andi Crown Photography.

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Why I wrote the play I wrote

PENNY ASHTON

on Sense and Sensibility

“Okay, so what job shall I do now?”

That was my Facebook post on April 20, 2020, during NZ’s first Covid lockdown.

I was floundering because, since 1978, when my four-year-old self strutted into Christchurch’s Repertory Theatre, I had pretty much lived onstage. Being a professional performer was all I ever wanted to do and, happily, all I have done for the past 25 years. But thanks to that spike protein, suddenly it was all gone.

Admittedly, I enjoyed not checking ticket sales every ten minutes and receiving those Labour government subsidies, but this driven hustler was stuck in a Covid cul-de-sac.

My husband and I did self-medicate with wine (and alarmingly, he developed gout), but I was aimless as fuck.

So I posted, and this prompted the then Artistic Director of The Court Theatre, Daniel Pengelly, to slide into my DMs with, “Hello

lovely. Saw your Facebook post. Not an immediate earner... but we talked a while back about you adapting a classic for the main stage. Just thought I’d restart that convo.”

Dan had watched the National Theatre’s *Jane Eyre* online, so was hooked on the classics. At first, I thought he wanted a Brontë. No offence, Brontë-stans, but that depressed me, what with all the burning to death in an attic and terrible boyfriends. But when I suggested Austen, he responded with alacrity.

I have been drawn to Austen ever since I saw Emma Thompson’s adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* in London while on my OE. I never avidly devoured Austen’s books as a teen, but seeing it all come to glorious life on the big screen had me swooning. Turns out if you smoosh a gaggle of top tier actors, Ang Lee’s sweeping direction and Thompson’s sparkling take on Austen, I end up a happy sobbing mess. Every time.



My first Austen outing was in 2008 with the group-improvised musical *Austen Found*. I then penned my solo show *Promise and Promiscuity*, inspired by her canon. I adore being in her world – wearing a bonnet and corset, flouncing about being careful not to flash an ankle. Her characters and dialogue are delicious, and bringing them to life is a treat. I skewer her, but fondly. Disrespecting her would be madness. I emphasise the joy. I am a joy monger.

With genre improv, you also have to immerse yourself in the world so that every detail is at your fingertips. In doing so, I realised I found Jane's own story the most compelling: a story of a stropky woman's struggle for both independence and publication. In fact, so unseemly was it for a gentlewoman to sully herself with employment that when *Sense and Sensibility* was finally released in 1811, her name was not on the cover. *Pride and Prejudice* was "by the author of *Sense and Sensibility*". They were both smash hits.

I ADORE BEING IN HER WORLD

Her later books bore her real name, but tragically, by 1817 she was dead at only 41. Buried in Winchester Cathedral, her gravestone does not even mention her novels.

And so I decided I would write an adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* for a cast of six women, as a way to honour Austen, who was denied so much because she was one. Her writing beautifully encapsulates the only world she was *allowed* to inhabit as a gentlewoman, but is still so often dismissed as frothy 'women's stuff'. Anything that appeals more to women is often denigrated as less substantial. However, Austen is literature – even inventing new narrative styles – so anyone using her restrictions as a tool to reduce her further... can fuck off.

Sense and Sensibility is a wonderful story that is still so relevant; in a time of housing

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NEW WRITING FROM AOTEAROA

▶ **a mixtape for maladies**

By Ahilan Karunaharan

A collaboration between Agaram Productions, Auckland Theatre Company
and Te Ahurei Toi o Tāmaki Auckland Arts Festival

▶ **End of Summer Time**

By Roger Hall

▶ **MARY: The Birth of Frankenstein**

By Jess Sayer

▶ **Tiri: Te Araroa Woman Far Walking**

By Witi Ihimaera

▶ **Monster of the Week**

By Leo Gene Peters, Dan Goodwin,
Nathan Joe & Jane Yonge



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a mixtape for maladies, 2025
Photo by: Andi Crown

I EMPHASISE THE JOY. I AM A JOY MONGER.

insecurity, pay inequity, war-hungry men and the threat of respiratory illnesses, 1811 looked a lot like 2020. I was also excited to upscale from solo multi-roling to a cast of six women playing twenty-two characters, from butlers to cads to menopausal mothers. Watching Bronwyn Turei manfully ride her broom-horse around pelvis first as swaggering Willoughby is one of the play's absolute highlights.

Special thanks to Playmarket for your enthusiasm and for supporting an invaluable workshop. Infinite gratitude to The Court Theatre for mounting the first production

in the very institution I grew up attending, and to my second home, Circa Theatre, for programming it as my directorial debut. Thanks to Dan Pengelly for the spark, to the glorious women who brought the piece to life, to the marvellous crew, and to the near 11,000 people who roared with laughter at Austen's genius.

My favourite review comes from Erin Harrington: "As declarations of love are shared it's so earnest and heartfelt, so beautifully romantic, that both my companion and I feel quite teary."

I cried watching it onscreen in London, I cried when I finished writing it, I cried when I heard the audiences crying and cheering, and hell, I am crying now. Thanks be to Jane, if only you could only hear that thunderous applause.

PREVIOUS PAGE: *Sense and Sensibility* by Penny Ashton, based on the novel by Jane Austen, Circa Theatre, 2024. Image: Roc+ Photography.

Elevating heARTS and minds

Uplifting community and nurturing creativity in Tauranga

BAYCOURT
WHERE THE ARTS COME ALIVE!



TE WHANGANUI-A-TARA 2025

BY STEVIE HANCOX-MONK

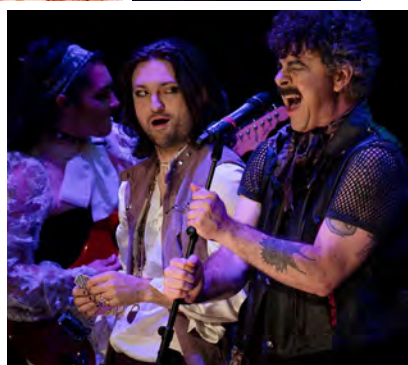
We are living in a time where those in power are actively working to undermine and erase rights for tangata whenua, trans and queer people, disabled folks and women. We have watched our 'leaders' continue to enable the decimation of Palestine and its people. What is the place of theatre at a time like this? At our core, we are storytellers, capable of inspiring change and fostering understanding with the work that we create. The wide variety of work in Pōneke this year reflected this, bringing a blend of power, levity, advocacy and illumination to audiences across the city.

Poata Alvie McKree's *The Handlers* shone a spotlight on the courage and activism of Māori and Pasifika women working in factories in the 1970s. It was rightly recognised by Ngā Whakarākei o Whāitaitai as the Production of the Year. Te Wehi Ratana and Tainui Tukiwaho's *ration the Queen's veges* expertly theatricalised the events surrounding Te Waka Hourua's redaction of the English treaty text at Te Papa. *Bottom Surgery* by Lily Catastrophe offered an intimate and comedic glimpse into Lily's experience navigating the complex journey of gender-affirming surgery. Regan Taylor's *Re-Engineered* explored the impact of systemic racism on Māori, captivating audiences with Regan's innate energy and charm. Hariata and Tamati Moriarty debuted *Waenga*, a challenge to the current government to engage rangatahi in the political system. Kia Mau Festival was incredible, delving into multi-faceted explorations of identity. The astounding voices of Raureti Ormond's "musical rite of identity" *He Ingoa*, graced our ears and souls. *The Aotearoans*, Ihaka

Martyn's latest work, was a bold ensemble piece which questioned the modern identity crisis for people living on this stolen land. Touch Compass brought us *Aiga*, a deeply moving disability-led work which seamlessly wove accessibility features into the fabric of Lusi Faiva's own story. Nathan Joe enthralled audiences with *A Short History of Asian New Zealand Theatre*. Each night, a different Asian performer was charged with presenting an unseen script, to be performed while pedalling a stationary bike.

WHAT IS THE PLACE OF THEATRE AT A TIME LIKE THIS?

Sela Faletolu-Fasi's *Love; Mum* was an emotional insight into the complexities of motherhood. It had audiences weeping. *Give Way – The Musical* by Steven Page provided a satirical account of a young Ministry of Transport employee disputing traffic control regulations. *Over and Out*, a new work from Pōneke's sweetheart Jackson Burling, was an exciting display of precision and layered storytelling; it scooped a whopping 10 nominations at Ngā Whakarākei o Whāitaitai. The Tiwhas brought the house down boots with a refreshed *Matariki Spectacular*, wowing us with the absolute force of their talent. Andy Manning, William Duignan and Ania Upstill's *Antonio!* gave us queer, punk, singing pirates. Adam Rapp's *The Sound Inside* was an enigmatic and precise piece of work – director Stella Reid gave us a masterclass in blending all the moving elements of a production.



WE ARE STORYTELLERS, CAPABLE OF INSPIRING CHANGE



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
LEFT: *Robin Hood – The
Pantomime* by Simon Leary
and Gavin Rutherford,
Circa Theatre. Image:
Maeve O'Connell.

Bottom Surgery by Lily
Catastrophe, BATS.
Image: Afrina Razi.

He Ingoa by Raureti Ormond,
Kia Mau Festival, Circa
Theatre. Image: Jode Wade Lee.

Antonio! by William Duignan,
Andy Manning and Ania
Upstill, The Hannah.
Image: Afrina Razi.

*The Man Whose Mother Was a
Pirate – The Musical* adapted
by Nino Raphael from the
book by Margaret Mahy, The
Hannah. Image: Mason Rudd.

The Aotearoans by Ihaka
Martyn, Kia Mau Festival,
Circa Theatre. Image:
Eugénie Aran.

Re-Engineered by Regan Taylor,
Maunga Tay-Tay Productions,
Circa Theatre. Image:
Taylor-Rose Terekia.

THIS PAGE: *The Home
Inside* by Emma Rattenburg,
Wonderlight Theatre Aotearoa,
BATS. Image: Anna Barker.

PAGE 12: *The Handlers* by
Poata Alvie McKree, Kia Mau
Festival, Circa Theatre.
Image: Roc+ Photography.

Artists were bold in form this year, with works taking some brilliantly unique shapes: Tom Knowles had us crying with laughter while we sang alongside him in *Roadkill: The Uber-Cool Musical*, all from inside a 10-seater van reimagined as a karaoke room; Lia Kelly's durational work *The Night is Always Darkest* invited us for an illuminating sleepover; and a2 Company's multi-disciplinary piece *Running into the Sun* proved that musicians thrive when integrated into choreography – I'm still thinking about that drummer being dragged downstage on a carpet while still playing.

2025 saw many successful productions return to Pōneke, like EBKM's *Heartbreak Hotel*; Maria William's solo comedy *Anxiety! The Musical*; *The Griegol* by Trick of the Light; and Eliza Sanders' *Manage Your Expectations*.

And to wrap up the year, Circa's pantomime delighted as per usual, gifting audiences one of the best jokes I've ever seen on stage: when stage manager Marshall Rankin donned judicial attire and presented the Sheriff with a document initiating martial law as "Marshall Law".

The Pōneke theatre community experienced some mighty losses, with the closure of Te Auaha and the passing of Jen Lal and Rose Kirkup. Jen and Rose were integral to the heartbeat of the arts sector in Pōneke. Rose was a prodigious creative mind brimming with advocacy, love and straight-up cool ideas, who kept creating right up until their final days. I think about Rose a lot – how they not only took every opportunity to make but also built opportunities for others to do the same.

We are often quick to second-guess the validity of our work and wonder whether it's even wanted. It is powerful to remember that our minds and artistic endeavours have value – despite financial instability and limited funding, despite malice and judgement from people who only recognise the power of the arts when they need it most. We must keep making our art, telling our stories, and celebrating our individuality. We're good at it.



ORIGIN STORY

*Jason Te Kare on a decade of development at ONEONESIX:
a theatre that proves how great work grows from community.*

The story of ONEONESIX begins with a very familiar problem in theatre: the search for a space. The venue for a workshop has fallen through. Someone goes to Whangārei District Council, asking for a space for two weeks. They're given the keys to an empty church hall on Bank Street that the council is considering selling off.

The workshop they needed the hall for would be led by John Bolton. Laurel Devenie remembers the moment he walked into the room and stopped – not because it was impressive, but because it was familiar. John realised he'd worked in that same room in the 1980s, with young people, when it had been used as an Arts Council space. The way Laurel tells it, the coincidence wasn't proof or prophecy. It was smaller than that. A moment of possibility... *What if we held onto the keys?*

The group at the centre of this early push was Company of Giants, which grew out of various projects with Northland Youth Theatre. This small collective of freelancers were committed to Whangārei, making site-specific work and activating whatever spaces they could. They were committed, but not resourced.

Laurel's favourite detail is both funny and devastatingly clear. Company of Giants had about \$300 in the bank.

That number matters because it tells you what kind of beginning this was. Not a launch with branding, funding and a three-year plan. They were a handful of artists trying to hold on to a set of keys long enough to see what might be possible.

She describes the next stage as both hope and panic. The enthusiastic collective lobbied council and tried to secure the space. At one point they even floated the idea of buying the building for a dollar. They were turned down. Eventually, Council agreed to a lease, beginning with a one-year trial at a peppercorn rent.

And then the new fear arrived... *Now what?*

They had a lease but no model. Having a building is not the same as having a sustainable way to keep it open. Laurel describes a fleeting romantic fantasy – becoming the Kneehigh Theatre Company of Aotearoa, making a steady stream of work in their own barn. A harsh reality dawned quickly – they simply couldn't afford to. They didn't have the money to constantly generate work in their own venue.

WHAT IF WE HELD ONTO THE KEYS?

PAGE 16 AND BELOW:
Ocean Ocean by Company
of Giants and Soju Shots,
ONEONESIX. Image:
Amy & May Creative.

FAR RIGHT: Laurel Devenie
outside ONEONESIX.
Image: Nimmy Santhosh.

So the defining question became... *Who needs the space?*

That question is the seed of ONEONESIX's identity. Instead of asking what they wanted to present, they asked how to make the building useful – how to invite the community into the whare and then let the whare belong to the community. Laurel's tone stays charmingly honest – they were making it up, learning as they went, trying things because they didn't know what else to do.

Then came a reality check. Rates.

Laurel laughs at how naive they were: charging people a dollar to use the space, then suddenly facing a rates bill. They scrambled to raise funds by telling the story of why the space mattered. They didn't realise it at the time, but learning to tell this story became an important lesson for the future. Elected members in councils change, but the ability to articulate why a space matters to its community is what helps it endure beyond personnel changes.

Leaping, learning, then building structure around what works became a recurring rhythm for those involved with ONEONESIX.

In the early days, they needed the space to be alive. That meant getting the whare and its people into a dependable rhythm – not occasionally, but reliably. One strategy was beautifully simple: start a regular community activity that's open to anyone. Laurel had been in a drop-in choir in Auckland; she asked Zoe Booty,



a choir leader newly returned to town to start one at ONEONESIX. On the first Monday night, Laurel and Zoe waited, unsure if anyone would show.

Eighty people turned up.

The choir ran every Monday for the first eight years – sometimes 10 people, sometimes 80. What mattered more than commitment back then was regularity: a dependable way for the community to enter the building and start feeling ownership.

Then something subtle happened. Those people became an audience. “People come into this space and then they go, ‘Oh cool, there’s a show’,” Laurel says, describing the slow conversion of casual participation into sustained support.

ONEONESIX learned early that you don’t build a venue by polishing a room – you build it by lowering the threshold. If the door is easy to walk through on a Monday night, it becomes easier to walk through on a Friday night too – for a reading, a rehearsal sharing, a show whose poster is on the wall. A small example of this cross-pollination is Beagle Radio, which set up a studio in the corner of the building early on. It brought a steady flow of people in and out, becoming another reason for someone to feel the building belonged to them.

The early calendar could be gloriously eclectic – deaf vegan cooking classes in the kitchen, a skate school half an hour later, then a solo show a couple of days after that. Laurel describes those overlaps with affection, because the variety wasn’t chaos for its own sake – it was a way of letting different communities brush up against each other until the building’s function as a gathering place became undeniable.

If the choir was the heartbeat, the visiting artists were the muscle. Each project left something behind – skills, equipment, confidence, relationships.

Laurel points to one early example that still defines how she thinks about ONEONESIX:



the arrival of *Shot Bro* by Rob Mkoraka. Rob got in touch after hearing the space existed. Laurel remembers how honest those early conversations were – nobody really knew what to charge. They had no lighting grid, no curtains, and the seating was plastic chairs borrowed from her dad’s garage. The venue wasn’t offering polish, it was offering possibility.

Then crucially, *Shot Bro* left something behind. They’d got funding which paid for the first lighting bar. The work was shown over a weekend to an audience who arrived for something brand new. It went on to be seen by many, many more audiences.

Laurel’s point isn’t nostalgia. It’s an operating principle: “Every project moves ONEONESIX forward... every artist that comes [to us] pushes the space and the community forward.”

She traces that same logic to a later moment, when ONEONESIX hosted a sold-out season from a more established company and realised mid-season they needed a house technician to keep up with what the space was now capable of holding. They found someone. The space grew, the infrastructure caught up, and the possibilities widened.





Even now, Laurel emphasises how materially modest the venue remains. The lighting rig has been entirely donated, and they still haven't bought a single light. The value is in malleability – an affordable, accessible space where people will help you build an audience.

Some of the most revealing stories Laurel tells aren't about "big-name seasons." They're about the moments when emerging artists find themselves in the work, and that work lands with an audience.

Not long after ONEONESIX signed its lease, a group of Toi Whakaari first-year solo performances came up to Whangārei. Laurel describes how it began: Lutz Hamm – then in his first year of training and also a founding member of Company of Giants – was creating a 20-minute solo alongside his class. After a phone call with him, Laurel thought, "Let's see if we can get some of them to ONEONESIX."

In the end, six solos came – three by Whangārei locals and three others. They sold out. Extra sessions were added. They sold out too. Every performance was given a standing ovation.

When asked for a moment that made her go, "this is who we are," Laurel points to those solos. The clarity came quickly – audiences weren't only ready for performance, they were hungry

LEAPING, LEARNING, THEN BUILDING STRUCTURE

ABOVE: Members of the ONEONESIX whānau, 2026.
Image: Nimmy Santhosh.

LEFT: *Ocean Ocean* by Company of Giants and Soju Shots, ONEONESIX.
Image: Amy & May Creative.

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for new voices – new New Zealand voices. And because it happened within months of signing the lease, it landed as a guiding star for the whare: “That’s what we’re here to do.”

Back then, they were still improvising basics – building rostra seating, blacking out the space with building paper because they didn’t have curtains. The work landed anyway; the audience came. The fact that half the solos were by locals clarified the way forward. Make pathways visible, and let professional practice meet community practice in a way that invites local people into the conversation.

As ONEONESIX grew, demand intensified. Laurel describes a period where a number of strong projects all wanted the same programming window. There was a squeeze

between touring companies and local making. Her response is practical and developmental – the venue learned to block time proactively for local work. Matariki is one of those times, set aside so local projects aren’t squeezed out by exciting touring opportunities.

The space is now busy in multiple ways – moving between rehearsals, development, performance and community use. The whare and its people are still adjusting to meet that reality. But the underlying question remains steady... *Who needs the space, and how do we keep it accessible?*

In 2023, the philosophy behind ONEONESIX became deliberate strategy. Looking to

ABOVE: *Ocean Ocean* by Company of Giants and Soju Shots, ONEONESIX. Image: Amy & May Creative.





THE POSSIBILITIES WIDENED

various directing programmes and development frameworks for emerging artists, they asked: what's our version of this? Ignited by the desire to better support leaders and local people to make new work, their big questions bloomed into an eight-month sharing of arts practice among the community. Artists of different ages and stages shared with each other in workshops, facilitation and meals. When these questions were first raised, Laurel thought she'd be doing a lot of mentoring for emerging artists; instead, it became the local creative community learning together and from one another.

When Laurel talks about what guides difficult decisions, she describes an active board – people who understand the reality of the place because they're involved both as audience and as artists. They turn up to working bees – painting, cleaning and gardening.

Decision-making, for her, is relational: bring it to the group and find a way that maintains relationships and upholds mana. It's less a set of rules on the wall than a way of working: decisions made by people who are physically in the whare, and therefore accountable to it.

Laurel's big learning is the one that ties the whole story together. The work isn't controlling outcomes – it's creating conditions for collaboration, then recognising the moment when something is ready and “pouncing”.

Some of that work is unglamorous – nudging people toward funding applications, sitting beside artists as they take next steps, inventing local processes because no manual arrives in the mail. Laurel notes they've also started doing more “producing” work – production management, sound design, the behind-the-scenes labour that helps local work grow.

That shift – from hoping things happen to creating the conditions for them – is also what guides ONEONESIX forward. The venue's earliest years were about proving the whare could be alive – filling it with regular rhythms, welcoming eclectic use, building trust one key handover at a time. Now, the proof has changed shape. Demand is higher. Local artists are stronger.

LEFT: Creative Northland regional consultation, ONEONESIX, 2018.

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The question is no longer how ONEONESIX keeps the doors open but how they keep the doors open for the work that most needs it.

Laurel's "this is who we are" moment matters because it's a star to navigate to. It says: this place exists for new voices; for the meeting point between community practice and professional practice; for young artists who might one day leave, and might also one day come back. The ladder has to

begin somewhere, and in a regional context it often has to be built rung by rung, by the same hands.

So the next chapter isn't simply bigger, it's just clearer. Protecting time for local work. Keeping the space malleable and affordable. Supporting artists through the unglamorous steps and then, when the work is ready, helping it step beyond the whare. All while continuing the work Laurel learned early: telling the story again and again – to each new council, each new funder, each new wave of people who walk in and realise they're welcome.

Because ONEONESIX began with a scramble. What it has become is a practice of making possibility reliable.

HOPE AND PANIC

ABOVE: *A Vaudeville of Flowers* by Company of Giants, ONEONESIX, 2025. Image: Nimmy Santhosh.

THE NEW TECH MERRY-GO-ROUND

The tech giants have promised a brave new world of limitless creativity. Playwrights aren't convinced. Claire Hiria Dunning considers what AI means for art, labour and the future of storytelling.



The US Copyright Act of 1909 dealt an upsetting blow to a business known as the Apollo Company. How, they put to the courts, was their product to thrive without the priceless input of other peoples' creative labour? Surely forcing them to pay for rights would destroy them.

Their product? The player piano.

You know, the ones that magically play themselves? And in this case, the rights being breached were those of composers and music publishers.

Put a pin in that thought.

In March, Playmarket surveyed the playwrights they represent to better understand the impacts of AI on their artistic practice. Like many of the respondents, I have felt like Cassandra of Troy gnashing and wailing against an inevitable tide of AI-driven laziness and idiocy. A couple of years ago, I railed against the stuff in a post on the Māori Literature Blog, pointing out that we who grew up on tales of Rumpelstiltskin and other fairy bastards should know better than to feed a single part of ourselves into these abominations. Then last year, I flounced dramatically out of a writers' group when two members would not listen to my presaging of doom as they gleefully extolled the virtues of *loading their entire manuscripts into the damn machines...*

As much as we might want to stick our heads in the sand though, the situation is ever-evolving. I don't want us playwrights getting left behind, stuck in ways of thinking that are a couple of years out of date. Everyone does this, so don't feel like I'm judging you. I'm here to pass on the news – good and bad – that I've heard direct from the mouths of key industry figures, including playwrights.

Here's what's going on:

- ◆ Yes, there are New Zealand playwrights who are affected by AI giants scraping their works into the training datasets of their models. Among Playmarket clients, the most affected group has been playwrights with plays published by other organisations – for example, older publications by university presses. As for the works Playmarket holds in its digital safekeeping, Playmarket is staying ahead of the security game so that none of our plays get swept up.
- ◆ There are currently around eighty court cases in the US alone concerning AI companies gobbling up copyrighted materials into their training data. This, I am told, is a significantly large number. The outrage is real and tangible, even if at times it might feel like the world is against us. Worth noting though: unless you have your works copyrighted in the US, you're highly unlikely to see any money come out of these class actions.
- ◆ We have reached a point where some large players in the copyright space have started using their big sway to make changes.

While the Disney-Sora AI deal fell through earlier this year, Netflix and Lionsgate have made steps into the AI space, and filmmakers like Steven Soderbergh and Darren Aronofsky have endorsed the use of AI in their field. While such deals and endorsements might feel like a disappointing surrender at first glance, it may also represent the start of a shift over time towards greater regulation and fairer licencing for all. Watch this space.

- ◆ Everyone I've spoken to who is concerned with the copyright of literary works, including plays, scripts and novels, have a rough consensus on this guidance: you may use AI for the business side of your affairs – such as admin or productivity – but, in order to be copyrightable within New Zealand, your actual written work must be created by you, the human. There are, of course, more and more nuances that will reveal themselves over time as this situation evolves. What about editing? What about purposeful collaboration with an AI agent to write something? All I can say for certain now is productivity = yes, creativity = no is the current word out there.

“Use AI to make vaccines or solve global warming, but fuck AI slop creation and soulless art.”

ANDERS FALSTIE-JENSEN

- ◆ Here's my hot take from the research I undertook: playwrights in Aotearoa are highly discerning and ready to fight for each other. Some of you get down about this topic and assume the worst about our chances. But you are not alone. In this very small niche of this corner of the world, there is still a strong commitment

to protecting one another and doing what is right and fair. I'm not just talking about playwrights defending playwrights, I'm talking about writers in other mediums, as well as producers and key industry figures. So please take heart. Not all is lost – but we must actively resist the bad parts of this technology instead of giving up and/or in.

I'm sure many of us would like to see AI suffer a similarly obscure demise as the player piano, but that's not the only reason why I brought up that piece of history. The example of the player piano came up recently in conversation with Sam Irvine from Tāwhia Copyright Aotearoa (TCA). He raised an important angle I hadn't considered before: none of this is new. Since 1909, new technology has run with the same playbook as the player piano. They start by stealing, claim they desperately need to do so to make the thing work, and inevitably find themselves in court.

More often than not, after a six- or seven-year cycle, the courts land on the side of requiring technology to respect copyright. This is good news for those of us protected by it, but more needs to be done. Sam assured me that TCA, along with other organisations, is actively lobbying to get the government to take a more engaged stance on this topic. We can see Europe taking bigger strides to protect people and their work against the steamrolling of Big Tech. Hopefully, we can work to get some of that good happening here too.

So while we wait for that cycle to play out, what can the humble antipodean playwright do when faced with this unholy juggernaut of ignorance and greed? Having read the survey results, I know that some of you are ready to give into cynicism and despair. I would caution against this, as your surrender is exactly what the tech bros want. With this in mind, I asked Sam Irvine at TCA, Jenny Nagle at the New Zealand Society of Authors, Paula Browning at WeCreate and Alice Shearman at the New Zealand Writers Guild what we can do. I was heartened to hear their advice.

- ◆ Continue to exercise caution with your use of AI, if you use it at all. Best practice advises against feeding any of your creative work into the machines. So yes, sorry to those of you who use it to edit your words directly – but you are playing with fire when you do so. While some AI software has ‘opt out’ options and claims to protect your input from being used to train their models... do you believe them? Given what tech companies have gotten away with over the last couple of decades, I don’t think it’s silly to practice some self-defence against their claims that they respect your data.
- ◆ Even if you just write for the stage rather than screen, I encourage you to look up the New Zealand Writers Guild’s AI Advice for Screenwriters (search that phrase and it will be the first result). Alice pointed me to this document, which is regularly updated with the latest guidance about the ever-evolving nuances of the situation. It is written in plain English with examples of common scenarios that could apply as much to playwrights as they do to screenwriters.
- ◆ If you are using AI for research or administrative work, always be sure to check its output. Remember, the technology works based on prediction of language. It isn’t seeking the truest information. It can’t; it doesn’t have the means to distinguish between truth and fiction (and given how few adults can, can we blame it?). It’s going for the most popular information. Do you want to perpetuate misinformation for the sake of expediency?
- ◆ If you encounter your copyright being breached on our shores, Sam has reminded me that Copyright Licencing is there to help you with advice, including subsidised legal help should the need arise.
- ◆ Take part in collective action when and where you can. As Jenny told me, “AI legislation is developing too slowly, though Australia and the UK now have a framework for regulation, and the EU Laws now lead the way”. Hopefully our government speeds up in its approach to regulating AI, but with recent news of them replacing public services with the machines, I’d be more afraid of them blindly walking into selling us down the river instead of protecting us. So the more voices added to the pressure, the better. They are, of course, being lobbied by tech companies, so we need to speak louder and drown out those wormtongues.
- ◆ Protect your colleagues in other creative industries when and where you can. Don’t use AI for the design and wholesale production of public-facing artwork such as posters, or music in your productions, or creating marketing videos. If you use it for your own personal envisioning during pre-production, I don’t need to know, and neither does anybody else. But if we can’t



ABOVE: Claire Hiria Dunning. Image: Amanda Billing.

stand up for our fellow creatives, why should we expect anyone to give a stuff about us?

- ◆ Protect yourself when working with producers and production companies, especially if you're working with them directly rather than in concert with Playmarket. Stipulate that your work may not be fed into a machine, for example, by a marketing department devoid of all ethics and sense who want to generate copy for social media!
- ◆ Keep abreast of developments in this space, especially in regards to the software you use for word processing and file storage. Google Drive and Microsoft Word have already been compromised. Consider alternatives such as Ellipsis, Scrivener and Final Draft. Decide for yourself what's more important: the ease of inertia, or protecting your work.
- ◆ As for your own use of AI, decide where your ethics lie. I'm not here to preach about the evils; by now, you've surely heard all you need to hear. (To be clear about my own stance, so that I'm not misunderstood: I hate what this technology is doing to the environment, and if I could throw it into a bathtub like a toaster and kill the damn machines, I would.) But by the same token, don't feel pressured to add it to your life because of fear of missing out.

Unfortunately, despite my ethics, my children and I must eat. When my day job forced AI upon us, something unexpected happened: I became a role model in this technology that I abhor. How did I manage this feat of self-pretzelizing? Simple: I'm a writer. I wrote to this false god in plain, everyday language, and I made it do precisely as I asked. The non-writers I work with now value my writing skills. I tell you this because I believe that you will not get left behind, so long as you educate yourself on the topic and apply your skill sets when needed. Could it be that the

corporate world might actually start to see the value in us wordcrafters?

- ◆ Finally, continue to stay strong in your own creative practice. Like Paula told me, "we have to keep the human centred in all of this". These machines homogenise voice and, more often than not, will make the safest, most conventional choices. The jury is still out on whether they can evoke real emotion, or truly trick the most discerning among us (see the Commonwealth Prize scandal), or even do humour (some survey respondents said it could, and others said it absolutely could not!). They certainly can't approach anything close to authenticity, especially when it comes to perspectives outside of white, wealthy, male, able-bodied, cisgendered, straight – you name it. To borrow a phrase David Geary told me, it's going to lead to "the United States of Generica".

On the flip side, your talent has been honed through years of experience and craft. AI isn't currently capable of truly aping that. Given how AI is inundated every second with the most banal of requests from every Tom, Dick and Harry – and it's perpetually recursively training itself off of that data – I'm not sure it will ever become better writers than you or I.

"Theatre is the realm of relationships, navigating the universal but rarely spoken tension we grapple with between each other. AI isn't empathetic (yet), nor does it understand context. Because it doesn't know what the world is – what it feels like to be within it – because it doesn't perceive the physics of movement or light or sound, and because it doesn't know

the electrical difference between a tiny audience and a huge one, it can't replace the playwright."

WILLIAM DUGNAN

Will AI go the way of the player piano? As someone who works in tech, I think the result will be a lot more nuanced than the black and white answer we can give for the Apollo Company and its jaunty and now-rare novelty instrument. Optimistically, I want to see AI used for the things it's actually good at doing, such as having one computer talk to another, or analysing astronomically large datasets. But the genie is out of the bottle. Gone are the days when we could blithely trust that any given sentence – no matter how misinformed, offensive or banal – was written by a fellow semi-literate ape.

But we do have a unique position out of most, if not all, art forms. This is theatre, darling. The money was never good. The effort it takes to make theatre is too great to waste on dreck. It's hard enough to get producers interested in dazzling new works when the classics are still there and, more importantly, *free*. Out of all the many struggles we playwrights face, our greatest rival in getting our works staged will, continue to be the dude from four hundred years ago – not the dumb regurgitation machine trained through endless iterations of grocery lists and cybersex.

My thanks to Sam Irvine, Jenny Nagle, Paula Browning, Alice Shearman, David Geary, Murray Lynch, Shane Boshier, Nathan Joe and James Wenley for taking the time to speak to me, and to the many playwrights who took the time to respond to the survey. Your words gave me hope and guided me to seek out the information most needed at this point in the new-tech merry-go-round. Ngā mihi nui!

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ŌTEPOTI 2025

BY KELLY HOCKING

2,349. That's the number of focus groups, hui, unofficial backchannels and council-led inquiries I estimate local theatre practitioners have been asked to respond to since the Fortune closed. I believe theatre is a public service, like libraries, and that accessibility – whether physical, financial, or infrastructural – is fundamental to the art form. So I'll participate in one more exercise.

Bear with me as I attempt to summarise the state of play at the end of 2025.

Dunedin City Council's 2025-34 draft plan removed an earlier \$17.1 million allocation for performing arts infrastructure, prompting strong opposition from the sector. Following public submissions, the council reinstated the funding (split across multiple projects) and established a governance group to develop a citywide theatre action plan. Its first task? Reaching out to local theatremakers for further consultation...

The most exciting development in playwriting in Ōtepoti in 2025 was the news that Cindy Diver's award-winning *Wahine Mātātoa: The (Mostly) True Story of Erihāpeti Pātahi* had secured a new production in The Court Theatre's 2026 mainstage program. Originally developed through Prospect Park's Ōtepoti Theatre Lab, this play is a feat of collaboration among Ōtepoti artists. From Emily Duncan and H-J KilKelly at Prospect Park, to a slew of local actors working across various stages of development, to director Hilary Halba, who helmed the most recent Ōtepoti iteration, and with support from the teams at Wow! and Theatreworks, *Wahine Mātātoa*'s success is a testament to the talent and strength that underpin our theatre community.

Local companies were creative with their venue choices for new work. afterburner's *The Anderson Localisation* took advantage of our gothic architecture and maze-like streets to deliver a site-specific, interactive experience. Hic Sunt Dracones transformed a vacant building on Filluel Street into an inventive and accessible space for Lizzie Tollemache's *The Neurospice Girls*.

Our beloved New Athenaeum Theatre remained a favourite haunt for solo shows, with Nick Tipa's *Babyface* emerging as a standout work ahead of further touring in 2026.

The majority of New Zealand touring productions utilised Ōtepoti's more compact venues. Smaller-scale works including *Green Fingered*, *Supping with the Devil*, *Manage Your Expectations*, *Red Heavens*, *No No No*, *Suitcase Show* and *The Tiny Show* fit comfortably into intimate or unconventional spaces.

Penny Ashton's *The Tempestuous* utilised the Regent Theatre's 'stage-on-a-stage' configuration, transforming the mainstage into a more intimate performance venue. Proposed raked seating would improve sightlines and better realise the format's potential.

While many larger touring companies have cited Dunedin's lack of a fit-for-purpose mid-sized venue as a barrier to touring, several productions travelled to Ōtepoti in 2025. Indian Ink's *Paradise or the Impermanence of Ice Cream* and Gregory Cooper's *GOMIL: Grumpy Old Man in Lycra* both played the Regent, demonstrating that larger productions can still find an audience in Ōtepoti.



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The Mayfair Theatre hosted both *Upu*, curated by Grace Iwashita-Taylor, and *Speed is Emotional* by Jo Randerson. I saw the latter, and while I welcomed a show exploring ADHD and hidden disability, I was struck by the irony of experiencing it in a venue that remains challenging from an accessibility perspective. In a city with few affordable venues capable of seating mid-sized audiences, accessibility too often becomes the compromise.

PAGE 34: *Wahine Mātātoa: The (Mostly) True Story of Erihāpeti Pātahi* by Cindy Diver, Theatreworks and Wow! Productions, Allen Hall Theatre. Image: Connor Diver Photography.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: *The Neurospice Girls* by Lizzie Tollemache, Hic Sunt Dracones, Filluel Street. Image: Andrew MacKay and Kea Photos. *The Tempestuous* by Penny Ashton. Image: Sam Millen. *Babyface* by Nick Tipa, Dunedin Fringe Festival, New Athenaeum Theatre.

CURRENTS OF CREATIVITY

So, we made it through the long interruption. But what does artistic practice look like for playwrights on the other side? We asked Rachel Callinan to find out.



At the end of 2025, I had the delight of sitting with three heavyweights of the theatre industry. Hailing from three different generations, genres and geographic locations, I was joined in the Playmarket office by Te Whanganui-a-Tara locals Jack McGee and Jamie McCaskill (Ngāti Tamaterā, Ngāpuhi, Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi), alongside Kathryn Burnett, who joined us from Tāmaki Makaurau via Zoom. In a short amount of time, we caught a glimpse of each playwright's world and discovered that, for us writers, Playmarket really is an oasis.

(Kathryn enters the chat)

Kathryn: Murray Lynch!

Rachel: Oh no! This is Jack! *(Adjusts screen)*

Kathryn: Oh, hi Jack. All I saw was a blur of a bald head and a bit of an arm and thought, 'it's Murray'.

Jack: It's an honour to be mistaken for Murray, so I'll take that.

Rachel: I thought we'd start with how you were each drawn into theatre. Only 0.004% of New Zealanders are playwrights...

Jamie: We're rare.

Rachel: So how did we end up here?

Kathryn: Mum took me to see *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. I was just so enthralled. I was always a writery wordy person. I studied to be a journalist and then went, 'Nope, I'm a creative writer.' And so, I ended up working in TV.

In a lull, I got together with Nick Ward and we wrote *Mike and Virginia* based on a faux argument we had when we were travelling. I decided, 'Oh, I know, I'll produce it.' *(Laughs)* I would never have done that if I'd known what I didn't know. From there, I've just been just chipping away at writing plays and I'm working on the sixth and seventh at the minute.

Jack: I did lots of children's theatre growing up, but never really thought that that was what I wanted to do – I always wanted to do film. I did my Masters in Scriptwriting with Ken Duncum at the IIML [International Institute of Modern Letters]. Near the end of the process, I realised – and I think Ken has this effect on a lot of people – every film I've ever written has been a play.

I was looking through them and I thought, 'wow, there's just a lot of people talking to each other and not many scene changes.' I started writing some theatre, and under Ken's guidance, I went from swimming upstream to swimming downstream. I wrote a couple of short plays, one of which was about my



own experiences walking from Wellington to Auckland [*Music Sounds Better Out Here*]. Writing something based on my own life and trying to remove myself from it as a developed character was an interesting exercise – this wasn't just *me* telling the story, I wanted it to be a show. That script got shortlisted for Playmarket's Playwrights b4 25 competition and I thought, 'cool, this is really what I want to do.' Then me and a group of friends started our theatre company [Squash Co. Arts Collective] and it's been the rhythm ever since.

Jamie: I was at drama school [UCOL Manawatū Campus] from 1999 to 2000. After I finished drama school, I was touring, doing TIE – Theatre in Education – I decided the only way to get acting jobs in Wellington was to write something. Me and my mate Regan [Taylor] talked about it and I wrote a musical called *Wassup, Bro?* We put it on in the Fringe Festival, produced it ourselves, and it went

PAGE 38: *Hide the Dog* by Jamie McCaskill and Nathan Maynard, Sydney Festival and Performing Lines, Sydney Opera House, 2023.

ABOVE: Jamie McCaskill, Circa Theatre Fundraiser, 2024.
Image: Stephen A'Court.

really well. Then I signed up with Playmarket in 2003 when Mark Amery was here.

I never considered myself a writer back then, I was just writing something to act in. But I grew to love writing. I didn't ever think I was going to be a writer – actually, my teachers in high school never thought I was any good at that kind of thing, so it was never in my periphery. It wasn't until I wrote maybe three or four plays that I thought, 'Oh, I quite like this writing thing, I don't have to be in everything I write.'

Rachel: And how's it going for you all out there at the moment, on the front line?

Kathryn: I have to say my respect and love for my peers in all the creative industries, not just this one, has increased. I really just want to support everybody I can in every way. It's tough that a lot of people who want to work are not working. We don't exactly have a sympathetic government. I'm so aware I'm in a creative industry bubble – it's difficult for lots of people *generally*.

Jack: Everywhere I've been making theatre, people have told me, "Oh, houses *used* to be big, and people *used* to hang out," and this feels *slightly* like a myth, that there was ever a time that people went to shows.

Jamie: It's not a myth!

Jack: People do not have money, and people are not spending it on going to shows. But there is also that constant 'readapting' that theatre has to do, to find new audiences. I remember in the New Zealand Fringe, there was a show called *Hausdown* [by Katie Hill and Ruby Carter] that was tiny – well, like a fringe show. They booked the Hannah Playhouse for it. I remember everyone in our young theatremaking community being like, 'What are they doing? They're going to lose all of their money.' Then they did three nights, packed out the Hannah and made a bazillion dollars!

They had clicked into this specific vibe of what young people wanted to see. I remember sitting in the audience, seeing people I knew



who didn't go to theatre and thinking, 'What have they done to figure this out?'

Rachel: What about you, Jamie? What have you been up to?

Jamie: I've been working in the social justice sector for the last three years, in prisons. In Whanganui Prison, we do a six-week writing course and then do a week devising. I'm currently working for the Women's Refuge up in Thames. I'm writing to advocate against family violence. Everything I'm writing at the moment has a social agenda and is using the arts to heal.

I love the social justice sector, but it's also research. One play that I'm writing at the moment is about three generations: a grandson, father and a grandfather. It's about how systemic and physical violence are transmitted through generations of whānau.

I also work with a whole lot of men up in Hauraki who are ex-convicts, gang members, people that have had trouble in their lives. I'm writing a play that's kind of an interactive therapy session, so whānau can watch what's been going on for them during the last year and a bit. Another part of that kaupapa is to write about the colonisation of Hauraki and



how that's affected tāne in Hauraki.

Rachel: And is it just with men? Inside the prison itself?

ABOVE TOP: *Owe* by Jack McGee, Squash Co. Arts Collective, BATS. Image: Eugénie Aran.

ABOVE: Jack McGee in rehearsal.



Jamie: Yeah, it's part of Women's Refuge but working with the men. I lead a programme called Tāne Whakapiripiri, working with the men on prevention.

Rachel: And what do you think the future holds for you as writers?

Jack: Because I'm younger, I'm still slightly mourning this idea of being a playwright as a job. When you start getting good at something and it's going well, you're like, 'awesome, this is what I'm gonna do for my life.' Then you slowly realise, no matter how successful you are, that is not an option.

It seems like you both have found solutions – Kathryn writing for TV, and Jamie, this amazing work in prisons. I'm trying to work out what the solution is for me, even if we do return to this perfect world where people are going to the theatre."

Kathryn: Nothing wrong with having a part-time job though. If you wanna be a writer, get a really good part-time job going. Very few

people in New Zealand get given money to write stuff, right?

It's also good to be in a world that is... *the world*.

Rachel: I had a short stint writing full-time and I found it really hard, writing about writing about writing. The more you put in the pot, the more you have to draw from.

Jack: I've found so much joy in my jobs, which I wasn't expecting. I teach children to ride bicycles in schools which is *super* rewarding. And my other job is working with Jamie's partner, Kali [Kopae], at Switched On Bikes, giving bike tours – mostly to these rich Americans, which is a little terrifying, because they offhandedly talk to you about the weapons they built to make their fortune. But at the same time, you're getting this really interesting window into the world–

Jamie: Research!

Jack: Exactly!

Jamie: I'm also learning to write from inspiration. I've received funding to write something and have given it back twice because I haven't completed it. I have to be inspired. I can't just sit down and... I'll try. I've tried!

But then, with screenwriting, I *have* just written two pages a day and finished a script. I mean, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

Rachel: What makes it come together?

Jamie: Could be just a thought. One thought. One line. One character switch. Anything which opens the floodgates. If I'm forcing it, when I read it, it's just really – and this is a word that I learned from Kathryn – *nebulous*.

Rachel: Nebulous?

Kathryn: They talk about clouds being nebulous – fluffy and vague.

Jamie: A lot of my plays when I'm not inspired are like that. Until you find that inspiration, that line or that motivation... then it starts coming out.

ABOVE: Nicola Cheeseman is *Back* by Kathryn Burnett, Plumb Theatre, Herald Theatre, 2024. Image: Sylvanna Andzakovic.

Kathryn: And when you find it, you know, right? You can feel it.

Jamie: It's obsessive. I have to get it out. Whether it's on a notepad or anything, I just have to get it out.

Jack: I have a friend who's a novelist who writes 1000 words a day. It drives all of us crazy because we've tried so hard to do that. I spend a week working in a fervour and then I pause and then come back. And it *is* obsessive.

Kathryn: I lose time. It feels like I'm channelling something and it feels easy. It doesn't happen very often, it's a great feeling when it does though.

I've discovered something about myself recently – I'm fundamentally a rebel. I've got this thing where I go, 'You're not the boss of me KB, I'm just gonna watch Netflix and eat and not do the work. Fuck you.' And that is my form of procrastination. I'm like a child.

Jamie: My advice for young writers, is just

focus on one idea, don't try and get it all in one play. New writers, when they've got an idea they're like, 'Oh, I'm going to write this play about roller coasters, but... Oh, I've really got to put in Gaza because that's on my mind as well... Oh and New Zealand politics... Oh and I like surfing...' So they're trying to get *all* these ideas into their first play or two.

Strip it back and stick with your one idea and then use your next idea for your next play.

That's my advice: just focus on one idea.

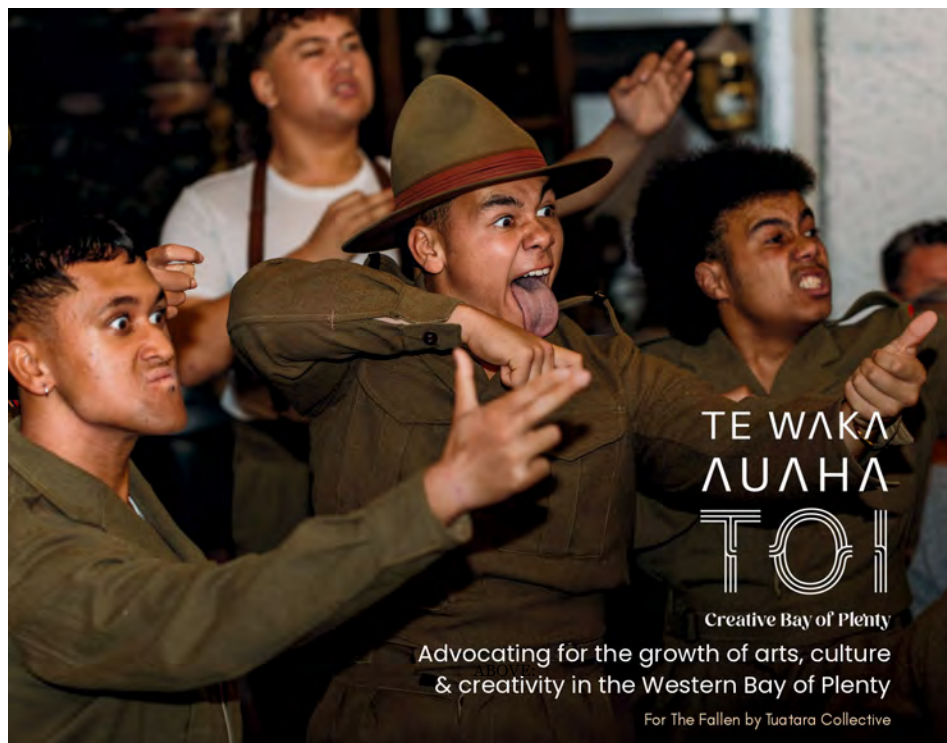
Don't try and get it all in one play.

Kathryn: A simple idea done with complexity.

Jamie: That's the formula. *(Laughs)*

Jack: Is your process very different writing for screen versus writing for theatre?

Jamie: Yeah, way different. I can write theatre without mapping out anything, just letting the dialogue flow. Screen is just so much more prescriptive. You have to map it out. Playwriting has way more flow – TV has a bit of flow too,





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but film is... *clunk clunk clunk clunk*.

Kathryn: The difference for me is if I'm writing for TV, it means somebody's paying me. The nudge of a deadline really works because I *have* to deliver it. The freedom of writing for theatre is intoxicating and awesome, which is why the Adam [Adam NZ Play Award] is so great. It sounds so manic when I say it out loud, but I have to put in something every year.

Rachel: And how can we thrive as writers?

Jack: It might be okay to not be thriving. Just do the best that you can and enjoy it while you can... But who is thriving at the moment? I'd like to meet you!

Jamie: From a Wellington perspective, the hauora of theatre isn't as strong as it was, say, 10 or 20 years ago. Our theatres, they're kind of dying.

But if we all just keep on writing and creating theatre and producing theatre, the health of Wellington theatre will improve and then everyone can start to thrive. It's a bit of a tough spot at the moment, so we've just gotta keep on chugging.

Jack: It totally is community.

Jamie: Yeah.

Jack: I've been facilitating a group of playwrights working to write a short play [*Tolerance*]. I'm watching them produce drafts and they're so good. Sitting with a bunch of playwrights who are excited about art and talking about art makes me way more optimistic.

Rachel: I definitely feel there's a groundswell at the moment.

Kathryn: Yeah, I do too. There's individual thriving, that's one thing. Then there's the localised thriving, which is the broader industry. My dream is that mainstream media would take theatre seriously as an art form and people would *know* about it, so they can come.



Theatre as a live experience is so therapeutic for people. Jamie, the space you're working in, the correlation is obvious.

With [my play] *Nicola Cheeseman is Back*, the amount of people that contacted me that went, 'I haven't cried since my dad died two years ago and I was bawling my eyes out at your play.' It's *such* a therapeutic experience.

The lack of media coverage is really detrimental. If New Zealand, broadly, would come to stuff, we'd have a flourishing industry, which means we would be thriving individually.

Jack: And I want to plug Playmarket as a resource that is keeping theatre alive. The deadline for an award is getting more plays finished than anything else in the country. They're so communicative and give you a place to take something...

Rachel: And bring playwrights together like this.

Kathryn: Absolutely. Anyone who's had a play reading organised by Playmarket knows the value of that.

ABOVE: Kathryn Burnett and Jodie Rimmer on the opening night of *Nicola Cheeseman is Back*, Herald Theatre, 2024. Image: Michelle Blundell.

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Jack: I don't think I would be as serious about playwriting if it wasn't for Playmarket. Also, I think it should be in the article that I was mistaken for Murray.

Kathryn: I think that's what you should call the article: 'Mistaken for Murray'.

And so, with a skip in our step and Murray on our mind, we went on our merry ways, out into what seems like a challenging landscape. But when you scratch not too far below the surface, you see that it's a wholly supportive one, bubbling with creatives eager to champion each other in order to thrive.



ABOVE: *Owe* by Jack McGee, Squash Co. Arts Collective, BATS. Image: Eugénie Aran.

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Artists gathering in the Festival Garden, 2026. Image by John Rata.

Why I wrote the play I wrote

MARAEA RAKURAKU

on Te Kooti Ariki Rangi Te Turuki

If they let me alone, I will live quietly. If not, I will fight.

I'm a gatherer-storer. I gather stories, images, ideas and quotes and store them until the story is ready to be told. I always know when it's ready, I hear a whisper or feel it ā tinana, *you've got enough*. Then I enter the world of what I am creating and start writing. At the heart is always a question – which I guard possessively and seek to answer, or not, in the writing of the work.

The idea of telling the life stories of tāne Māori by showing thematic snippets of the life of Te Kooti Ariki Rangi Te Turuki sat with me for over 15 years. As a descendent of Te Urewera, I have been surrounded by his story since I was a child, and generations before that, when he interacted with my tīpuna, who actually betrayed him. While I don't explore that aspect in the play, I carry that whakapapa nevertheless, and that shapes my creative approach whether I am aware of it or not. Knowing the history of this country and my positionality is vital to my storytelling. That involves the not good bits – though arguably that's subjective. Owning the varying parts of your own story is an examination, requiring a deep intake of breath because being

colonised sucks. Confronting the “master's tools [that] will never dismantle the master's house,” as Audre Lorde so eloquently describes, while pursuing mana motuhake, is the ongoing story of my life.

Te Kooti Ariki Rangi Te Turuki is a reimagined testimony of Te Kooti's life and his engagement with the crown, hapū and emerging iwi Māori while resisting colonisation, shown loosely through the stories of three contemporary tāne Māori – Ariki, Rangi and Te Turuki.

KŌINA TE MANA MOTUHAKE

In one throughline, set over the course of a day, comedian and expectant father Ariki is accused of a crime on his way to a gig. We see how he uses his comedic, politicised skillset to outmanoeuvre police while expressing the anxiety of impending fatherhood.

Rangi is a composite of the experiences of David Dougherty and Teina Pora – Māori men accused and sentenced to crimes they were both innocent of. We enter Rangi's

life during a day of his trial and experience his powerlessness with the legal system. It's devastating, and it's meant to be. I cried numerous times writing it. I wanted to evoke lawyer Marie Dyhrberg describing the moment when Teina Pora was found guilty of the murder of Susan Burdett: as tears fell from his bent head, splashing onto his kicks, he kept repeating, "didn't do it, didn't do it." That hopelessness follows Rangī for the next 10 years of imprisonment until something magical involving Te Kooti occurs.

Rangī's story ends in a homage to David Dougherty. I took inspiration from the photograph of David Dougherty standing in the rain – arms outstretched, head to the sky – on the day he was freed. How's that for a powerful image of hope?

Te Turuki, the youngest of the three, is a performance poet struggling with his place in the world. He is the only character who is a descendant of Te Kooti, and we see them interacting across time, reo and life. I wrote poetry specifically for Te Turuki to recite – pantoum, haiku, ode – in recognition of the many waiata Te Kooti composed and whakataukī attributed to him.

As for Te Kooti, and his magical, transportive qualities, we meet him on the day of the accident that would eventually claim his life months later. He's no longer hunted. He's aged. He's a survivor. He's contemplative. He has PTSD.

I spent my doctorate focused on wāhine Māori, mana wāhine, matemateāone, and the amalgamation of those concepts in determining and creating te mana motuhake in the representation of wāhine Māori. Switching my gaze to tāne felt like a rush of air filling my lungs as I broke the water's surface. It was both revelatory and freeing. Kōina te mana motuhake.

I wrote the first draft in a fortnight while in deep grief for my father, who had died a few months earlier. Kōina te matemateāone. When I read



IT'S DEVASTATING, AND IT'S MEANT TO BE

Te Kooti Ariki Rangī Te Turuki now, I still feel that grief and its potency on the page. I feel the rage and powerlessness on behalf of Māori men engaging in the legal system.

Most of all, though, I read the love I hold for my father, brothers, friends and cousins – some of whom died within quick succession of each other within a five-year period.

And the initial question, which revealed itself as I wrote *Te Kooti Ariki Rangī Te Turuki*, comes back to me: when those who witness the heart of you are no longer here, who remembers you? Kōina te matemateāone.

ABOVE: Maraea Rakuraku, 2025. Image: Mere Honeycombe.

CARE *V.S.* CONTROL

*Sameena Zehra unpacks the thorny topic of content advisories.
Are we protecting audiences or just policing art?*



Audience care, or audience control?
Alerts, or spoilers?
Meaningful, or performative?

There are almost as many opinions about pre-show content advisories as there are theatre practitioners, and their responses to the question “What do you think of...” chop and change, depending on the phrase that completes the question (generally speaking: content advisories good, trigger warnings bad).

It is well known that trigger warnings are embedded in contemporary theatre practice. Less well known, but fascinating, is that they were developed as early as the 1960s in a very different context. They were used in spaces to guide conversations around wartime PTSD – as well as in deeply politicised hui and kōrero within emerging feminist and Marxist movements, that were seeking to address the trauma of sexual assault, homophobia and racism.

Unless you are one of the soulless husks in human form that think empathy is a weakness, it is obvious we should care about people’s trauma, making space for them to come and go from hard discussions, engaging only in what they feel prepared for.

My question is this: has the use of trigger warnings been adequately shaped to be fit for purpose in a space not driven by the therapeutic exploration of personal experience, but by storytelling, metaphor and fantasy?

The more I explored the question, the more the implications of what I heard and read led me toward a much more interesting notion –

one that made me question the very way we experience theatre.

What if triggers, warnings and notes are the easy way out: a performative nonsense that abrogates real responsibility for audience care by providing just enough information to say “I warned you,” while avoiding the harder work of meaningfully holding space for trauma?

We want to avoid someone being harrowed by a concept, a phrase or visual depiction that relates to something traumatic for them. We don’t want strobe lights to bring on a seizure, and we don’t want the discussion of abortion to trigger a bad memory. Wait a minute, though... who decides abortion is a trigger? Abortion is healthcare. Would we ever consider a trigger warning for vaccinations, hip replacements or diabetes?

THE EASY WAY OUT

Perhaps we need to move away from the blithe acceptance of benevolence as the sole motivation behind trigger warnings and start considering also the introduction of control. After all, who decides what is a trigger and what is a fit topic for robust exploration, without needing to be a ‘trigger’. And *must* it be a trigger warning? In *Romeo and Juliet*, a prologue lets us know beforehand what to expect. What about a prologue before the show, a mention in the media release, or an online blurb that blends seamlessly into the plot description without



TRIGGER WARNINGS DO LITTLE TO ALLEVIATE TRAUMA

PAGE 50: *My Name is Gary Cooper* by Victor Rodger, Auckland Theatre Company, Maidment Theatre, 2007. Image: John McDermott.

ABOVE: *The Savage Coloniser Show* by Tusiata Avia, FCC, Auckland Arts Festival, Q Theatre, 2023. Image: Raymond Sagapolutele.

screaming from a side column about what audiences are potentially likely to find triggering?

Academic research, such as that conducted by Dr Victoria Bridgland at Adelaide's Flinders University, tells us that trigger warnings do little to alleviate trauma, may be ignored altogether, and would need to be so individually specific as to render the experience of the story itself redundant.

Well, now we're at a fork in the road of where this journey might lead us.

Victor Rodger, whose provocative and seminal work spans decades – beginning long before trigger warnings became standard practice – is simultaneously impatient and accepting. Whilst Rodger mostly resents the idea of trigger warnings, he concedes that context is important. His 2019 play, *Uma Lava*, carried a warning on Circa Theatre's website stating that it "hopefully offends most people" and that the play included strong language and sexual content.

When his play *My Name is Gary Cooper* opened in 2007, he was apprehensive about how Samoan elders might respond. As it turned out, one of the older Samoan women in the audience congratulated him on a show she had thoroughly enjoyed. Rodger recognises how we can underestimate

WHAT IS APPROPRIATE AND WHAT QUALIFIES AS A TRIGGER?

the robustness of our audience, and that sometimes content advisories are less for the audience and more for the actors – reassurance that the audience has been informed, so they may perform without anxiety for those experiencing the piece.

Okay, so context is important. But who sets the context, if not the creator? The playwright – yes, of course. But not just the playwright: the director and performers, who are the conduit between creation and audience, set context too. And who decides that certain words have specific meanings? Or that certain ideas are sacrosanct? What are the long term effects of trigger warnings? What kind of audiences are we building for the future, and what does that mean for the art we want to create?

Jonathan Bielski, Artistic Director of Auckland Theatre Company, acknowledges the difficult balancing act between sharing warnings the audience might need against the artistic aspirations of the play they will experience. He also speaks about his surprise at discovering how many people don't inform themselves before coming to see a play, but then, triggered by something that was clearly identified in the programme, want someone to be responsible for their discomfort. In that case, I ask: what the hell is the point of warnings anyway? Are we just creating an environment in which creators and practitioners are forced to self-censor because there is no way to make work that surprises or challenges?

And we're back at the same question: who decides what is appropriate and what qualifies as a trigger?

How do you mount a play like David Harrower's *Blackbird* in which a trigger warning will spoil the plot, stealing the

surprise and shock that is part of the thrill for the audience?

Do I need a warning for Tusiata Avia's *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt* or *The Savage Coloniser Show*? Don't I want to be torn apart by the things that should tear any human apart? Isn't that what theatre should do? For me, the answer is unequivocally, yes.

So then, how to take care of the audience who doesn't want to be torn apart – who is not yet ready to walk through their pain, who wants to be forewarned and therefore forearmed?

What if our experience of theatre was not a capitalism-inspired, reductive, one-size-fits-all shoehorn, but one that was capable of nuance, shaped around the needs of both a play and its intended audience? What if we built that experience together – creators, practitioners and audience collaborating in an encounter that has space for both individual agency and taking responsibility for one another.

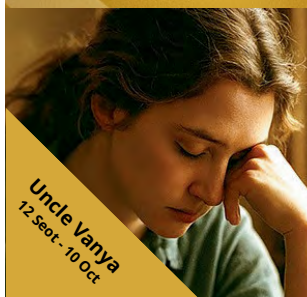
We watch plays in dark rooms. We sit still, we avoid coughing or accidentally bumping our neighbour's elbow on the shared armrest between seats. We laugh when we are supposed to, gasp in the appropriate places, and clap when the lights come up. We shush people unwrapping sweets, we roll our eyes at people who make involuntary noise, we feel righteous anger at the light of a mobile phone.

We have been trained to experience theatre in a particular way. More than that, we have been trained to conclude that every transgression of those rules is a deliberate attempt by a selfish stranger to ruin our experience. When the show ends, we empty out of the theatre and leave, alone with whatever churns inside us. The more I think about it, the more oppressive it feels.

Although theatre has mostly moved on from "Trigger Warnings" to terms such as "Audience Care" or "Content Advisories", the practice still feels fledgling. It feels

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more like regulatory standard-setting than something genuinely fit for purpose. It needs to be something more: something that gives audiences autonomy without compromising artistic intent.

What if we created a better way of being an audience? Care as a standard, without spoilers. Manaakitanga, embodied in te ao Māori, would allow us to confront, to discuss, to be surprised, and be in community as we walk through whatever trauma is standing in the way of us feeling whole.

What if we decided to create space after a performance so an audience didn't need to leave immediately, but could instead mingle and talk, or sit in a corner alone, comforted by the sound and mingling of others who had just experienced the same show? What if audience-care kaimahi became as standard as ushers, health and safety experts, or fire wardens – people who were present before and after shows as well?

WE CAN UNDERESTIMATE THE ROBUSTNESS OF OUR AUDIENCE

What if people were allowed to have tics, make noise, leave and return, consciously and deliberately experiencing a performance alongside their fellow audience members instead of sitting carefully and politely in the dark? What if we no longer had to feel scared – shadows of ourselves, forever apprehensive – because art was offering us a way through it, beyond it, once we felt ready or even ready-ish?

What if the theatre was the safe space, so the play didn't need to be?

Wouldn't that be a flourishing world of stories and song, tears and laughs, rage and love? Keep your trigger warnings. I want that.

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ŌTAUTAHĪ 2025

BY JOSIAH MORGAN

In post-earthquake, post-pandemic Christchurch, opportunities have grown for artists working inside and outside institutions. 2025 was shaped by a meaningful increase in physical infrastructure for performing arts. The city skyline was dominated by Te Kaha Stadium as it loomed toward its slated 2026 completion: a symbol of a city in the final stages of cultural recovery.

A few minutes' walk from Te Kaha, The Court Theatre opened new city-centre premises in the Performing Arts Precinct with a thoughtful production of Bruce Mason's *The End of the Golden Weather*, adapted by Raymond Hawthorne. Directed by Lara Macgregor, it was a production that acknowledged Christchurch's performing arts history while sketching a vision for its future. The casting was full of recognisable faces including Ian Mune and Mark Hadlow. I was particularly drawn into the meta-textual casting, which included a return to The Court stage for local legend and drama teacher Anna McPhail, as well as announcing a number of emerging Te Waipounamu performers including Reylene Rose Hilaga, who later anchored an excellent production of *Wolf Play* by Hansol Jung. *The End of the Golden Weather* was followed with a massively successful season of Roger Hall's *End of Summer Time*, skilfully performed by Ross Gumbley.

The Court's programming sat in strong relation with Christchurch-born-or-based artists, including a notable season of *Kitchen Chaos* by Lizzie Tollemache and David Ladderman. Victor Rodger's landmark play *Black Faggot* was cleanly directed by Anapela Polata'ivao. Their guest production *Kōpū*,

produced by Te Rēhia Theatre, made waves with audiences. Anecdotally speaking, it's the only piece of theatre my mother has bought a ticket for in the last three years.

Touring work from other major centres also found a home at Little Andromeda, with an absolutely raucous season of Riley Brebner's *Eat, Sleep, Dance, Repeat* a highlight of the year alongside Ella Yiannoutsos' thoughtful and dramaturgically tight *No No No*.

Little Andromeda continued to support independent artists. Sela Faletolu-Fasi's play *Love; Mum* played to sellout audiences, generating significant buzz across the arts community. Vital work to develop new plays was ongoing, with the theatre hosting readings of Dan Bain's *Jabberwock! (or, Eliza in Wonderland)* and Andrew Todd and Cathasaigh Ó Fiannachta's *The Consummate Professional*. They also presented fully-realised seasons of Bryn Sparks' *Coffin Ship* as well as two plays by Gregory Cooper: *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* and *A Christchurch Carol*. Cooper's 2025 output didn't stop there, as *GOMIL: Grumpy Old Man In Lycra* was seen at the Isaac Theatre Royal.

Work for young audiences flourished in Ōtautahi in 2025. In November, The Court hosted the annual Performing Arts and Young People Aotearoa hui. Cubbin Theatre Company completed its first year as artistic residents at Te Matatiki Toi Ora The Arts Centre, performing four thoroughly-researched plays for very young audiences aged 0-6. Cubbin's *Sportsball* was one of the highlights of my theatregoing calendar in 2025, a work that understood its audience and worked for them with dramaturgical rigour and clarity of vision.



The Arts Centre continued to make a mark in theatrical programming, hosting independently produced seasons of Ro Dalziel's *Cricket*, *Sex and the Universe* and A2 Company's absolutely electric *Running into the Sun*. For me, A2's was the production of the year, helping me reimagine what is possible in Aotearoa theatre.

In contrast to the city's institutional players, 2025 saw the emergence of Te Wā, a new experimental development space for artists to test and present work. In April, playwright Nathan Joe premiered his latest work *Score for a Glass Box*. Te Wā also hosted the debut season of *Faust on Trial*, in which audiences must vote each night for one actor to be locked in a cage onstage until the following night's performance.

Faust on Trial was developed at the new-look Hagley Theatre School as part of its six-month theatre creation course, which also saw *E Ipo*, *My Love* and *The Meeting* debut at the Isaac Theatre Royal before returning at Little Andromeda. The transformation of Hagley Theatre School was overseen by Pedro

Ilgenfritz, culminating in an excellent ensemble production of *The Odyssey* at Altiora that drew on the pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq.

Critical infrastructure continued to expand with the growth of Erin Harrington's Christchurch review hub Flat City Fieldnotes and the emergence of John Armstrong's Theatre Research NZ Substack, applying rigorous theory to the local landscape.

The productive interplay between the institutional and the independent continues to form the beating heart of the arts in Ōtautahi, as creatives in the city continue to make the case for Christchurch as a cultural centre in its own right.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: *The End of the Golden Weather* by Bruce Mason, adapted by Raymond Hawthorne, The Court Theatre. Image: Charlie Rose Creative. *Black Faggot* by Victor Rodger, The Court Theatre. Image: Ted Eason. *Running into the Sun* by Nadiyah Akbar and Ben Ashby, A2 Company. Image: Mehtab Singh.

PAGE 56: *E Ipo, My Love* by Gisele Proud and Tane Te Pakeke-Patterson, Little Andromeda. Image: Benny Joy Photography.

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Unforgettable

NICK TIPA

on *Michael James Manaia* by John Broughton

For the past ten years, whenever people have asked me what my favourite performances are, I have answered the same way: *Pupil Zero* at Dunedin Fringe 2015, *Peninsula* at Fortune Theatre in 2014, and the Taki Rua production of *Michael James Manaia*, also at Fortune. Each of these productions were influential for me, but it is *Michael James Manaia* to which my thoughts most often return.

Set either inside Manaia's own head or within the confines of a mental facility (the setting is open to interpretation according to playwright John Broughton), *Michael James Manaia* explores the titular character's early life, whānau, relationships and experiences in the Vietnam War. Manaia is pulled between recounting stories of childhood mischief with brother Mattie, spinning kōrero of ātua Māori, and facing the violence to which he has been witness and party. Manaia is a bullet, ricocheting off the walls of his own memories. Under the wallpaper, akoraka of intergenerational

trauma, colonisation and mental health are revealed.

Before rereading the play for this piece, I remembered only a few specifics. The lighting and set: minimal, sparse, but manifesting depth and dynamism through shadow. A moment of Te Kohe Tuhaka, who played Manaia, perched on top of a platform, his primal figure illuminated in the half-light. Snippets of 'Green, Green Grass of Home' puncturing the storytelling. The brutal and vulnerable final moments of the play.

It was the first solo show I'd seen, and it completely opened my mind to what theatre could be. With only Tuhaka on stage, a rudimentary shelter and a tech operator up the back, the audience were transported to the old Queen Mary Hospital in Ōtepoti, up to Kahungunu whenua near Hastings, all the way over to Vietnam, and back home to Aotearoa. One performer took us on a journey through the power of his own imagined world and, most importantly, the kōrero.



In the years since seeing *Michael James Manaia*, I've had the privilege of sharing kōrero with John Broughton. He is indefatigable in his curiosity and passion for stories, particularly those of our Māori soldiers, but also in his work in dentistry and hauora. He is also, oftentimes, quiet and unassuming. Returning to the words of his play now, it is incredible how separate the character of Manaia seems from John, and yet how honest, authentic and vibrant his words feel.

The night I saw the show, during its final moments, an older woman in the front row,

right in front of Tuhaka, spoke to him as if it were truly Manaia standing before her. "You're a beautiful man." It shocked me and it confused me because it felt so natural. At the time, 18 years of age and fresh out of high school, I didn't understand what it was to be in conversation with an audience; to be in communion with them. Nā reira, tēnā koe, e Te Kohe, i tāu whakamōhio mai me pēhea te mahi whakaari ka tika. And to John, e kore rawa e mutu āku mihi ki a koe.

ABOVE: *Michael James Manaia* by John Broughton, Taki Rua Productions, New Zealand Festival of the Arts, Downstage Theatre, 2012. Image: Philip Merry.

HOW TO MAKE A KIWI STORY SING

*What does it take to create a new musical in Aotearoa?
Shane Bosher finds out.*

**Four original musicals, born in Aotearoa.
Four very distinct pathways to production.**

It was December 2012. Guy Langford was studying with Philippe Gaulier in Paris when he wrote down a bold new idea: “Structured like the TV show, end with a cliffhanger, play it up.”

Six years later, *Shortland Street – The Musical*, co-written by Langford and Simon Bennett, premiered with Auckland Theatre Company.

At the time of writing its musical iteration, *Shortland Street* had been on our screens for 21 years. The challenge was choosing which particular story to tell. Langford settled on the bromance between Chris Warner and Hone Ropata. “*Shortland Street* is a reflection of New Zealand today. I think the best reflection of New Zealand in terms of our story and our cultural identity is the relationship between Māori and Pākehā,” Langford says.

While the narrative arc between Chris and Hone spanned three years, Langford found a way to condense it into two hours, adding other iconic characters such as Kirsty Knight, Lionel Skeggins, Jaki Manu and Marj Neilson. He also found ways to integrate some of the wider lineage through song. ‘The Five Wives

of Doctor Warner’ celebrated all the women who walked down the aisle with the much-lusted-after surgeon; ‘Be a Villain’ summoned every loose unit from Mackenzie Choat to the Ferndale Strangler.

“The dream was to make a grand musical at scale that is joyous. I wanted to make a kind of Broadway musical for New Zealand, in New Zealand. And I think we did that,” Langford reflects. “We were trying to make a show that we wanted to see.”

Developing a brand-new musical costs a pretty penny. Creative New Zealand supported the writing of the first draft of *Shortland Street – The Musical*, and Auckland Arts Festival supported a week-long development, culminating in a new work development presentation in 2017. But otherwise, funding proved difficult to secure. Later developments were either paid for by Langford or undertaken with fees waived.

“We even did a five-day workshop which was unpaid. We had actors join us and we shouted them a bougie dinner. In no way







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would we have been able to pay the \$20,000 cost of that workshop.”

While funding for the development was hard to secure, private investment was eventually raised to underwrite a national tour. But the tour never happened. Despite strong word of mouth, the Auckland Theatre Company season failed to take off and the tour was cancelled. It was both an artistic success and a box office flop.

From a marketing perspective, the tone of the show was never fully conveyed. They were simultaneously making fun of and celebrating *Shortland Street*. But audiences couldn't see that.

Disney's *Aladdin* didn't help. It was playing down the road at The Civic.

Cultural cringe was also at play. Langford laments, “We often heard the response, ‘I don't watch *Shortland Street*, therefore I won't see that show.’” He counters, “But people don't refuse to see *The Book of Mormon* or *Les Misérables* because they haven't read the book. They understand that a stage work can stand on its own.”

Langford believes that if they'd toured first before bringing it into Auckland, the show's trajectory might have looked different.

PAGE 63 AND ABOVE: *Shortland Street – The Musical*, music and lyrics by Guy Langford, book by Guy Langford with Simon Bennett, Auckland Theatre Company, ASB Waterfront Theatre, 2019. Images: Michael Smith.



"We might have had a different journey, building momentum, building word of mouth, getting a whole lot of reviews so that when we arrived in the hardest city to sell in, we already had a bit of a groundswell."

Langford looks back on the experience, saluting the wins. "I'm so happy that we did it, regardless of how many tickets were sold." And fortunately, other productions have followed.

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In 2018, New Zealand celebrated 125 years of women's suffrage. While everyone else was toasting progress, Cassandra Tse was frustrated. The commemorations failed to acknowledge the fact that Chinese women were denied citizenship – and therefore voting rights – until 1951. Ignited "partly by spite and resentment" and determined to explore this neglected history, Tse began researching Chinese immigration beyond the familiar stories of the gold miners. She found a striking statistic from the 1881 census: there were only nine women of Chinese descent recorded in the entire country. That figure

seemed almost impossible, but it would spark Tse's most ambitious musical work to date, *New Gold Mountain Woman*, written with composer Michael Stebbings.

Ambitious in scope, this new musical tells the imagined histories of these women. The narrative weaves from Guangdong to Aotearoa, bringing overlooked voices back into the national narrative.

New Gold Mountain Woman marks a big shift for Cassandra as a musical theatre writer. Previously, her works have been "fast turnaround pieces", written and produced over periods of around 18 months and made for smaller spaces such as BATS. This work has been developed through a grant from the Auckland Museum, a residency with the Michael King Writers' Centre and, in 2024, a week-long development as part of Breaking Ground.

In 2025, *Mountain Woman* was selected by The Hannah and Auckland Live for their New Work in Development initiative. This paid residency supports Cassandra and her collaborators through two week-long workshops across 2026, culminating in a further two-week development and public reading in 2027. It is the first time Cassandra has received substantial funding to workshop one of her musicals. Progress.

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That Bloody Woman started in a tent. Luke Di Somma and Gregory Cooper's irreverent rock musical about Kiwi suffragist Kate Sheppard was commissioned by the Christchurch Arts Festival and played a modest three-night season there in 2015. It was picked up by Auckland Theatre Company and The Court Theatre the following year before touring Aotearoa under the auspices of Tourmakers.

More than 50,000 is the back-of-the-envelope audience number. "No one knew *Bloody Woman* was going to be a hit.



Colin [McColl] took a punt on it and Ross [Gumbley] followed suit,” Di Somma says. It found an audience gradually, and by word of mouth and a cast recording.”

Di Somma reckons there is merit in starting small. “This is the *Daffodils* [a music theatre work by Ro Bright] model and the *Bloody Woman* model. We see these big Broadway shows, and we think that they started on Broadway. They [actually] start in The Drama Bookshop in New York, or Off-Broadway, or in a dingy little community theatre somewhere,” he notes. “Starting small is always the best way to give your work a chance to succeed.”

It has gone on to be produced by community theatres and schools throughout Australia and Aotearoa, and had its international premiere in Leeds in 2025.

.....

Best friends Adam Spedding and Bray Jeffrey have been cooking up pop-infused, dry-humoured and silly musicals since they met at high school. Their artistic practice is underpinned by a sense of adventure – *Schlunted*, which premiered in Auckland in 2016, was created on a dare to write, rehearse and produce a new musical in 100 days. They got it across the finish line.

Ten years ago, Spedding said he wanted to have a production in New York within five years. That goal took a little longer to

THERE IS MERIT IN STARTING SMALL

LEFT: Composer Luke Di Somma in rehearsal for *The Unruly Tourists*, NZ Opera, 2024.

ABOVE: *That Bloody Woman* by Luke Di Somma and Gregory Cooper, Auckland Theatre Company, Sky City Theatre, 2016. Image: Michael Smith.

realise, but in May 2026, their new musical *Forest High and the Glitch in the System* opened Off-Broadway.

This popstastic, sci-fi narrative exists because of a nudge from a New York literary agent, who told them they were looking for young adult content. Then, at the start of 2022, Jeffrey challenged,, “How many musicals do you think we could write in a year?” They wrote the first act of *Forest High* in two and a half months.

Spedding talks about the “business of resiliency, of getting rejected and rejected until you don’t.” He had been living and breathing that very idea when he received an invitation from The Players Theatre to premiere *Forest High* there. The season ran for a month and developed a cult following, with audience members coming back again and again. It also served as a platform for the writers to introduce their work to New York producers and other industry professionals. With a large cast of 16, *Forest High* was

Spedding and Jeffrey’s biggest swing to date. Produced as a profit-share venture, the production lost money, but to Spedding, “it was worth it.”

THE BUSINESS OF RESILIENCY

Because of their very nature – large casts, musicians, additional creatives, resource-hungry production elements – musicals are expensive to develop and hard to produce.

Di Somma wants more time for robust development. “There’s a tendency to get things up too early, scrimping on development time.” You have to work out what it’s not before you decide on what it is. Gestation is helpful, shortened pipelines are not.

He also believes we need to do more work to understand the skills required to write a good book. “The book is a really misunderstood



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concept in New Zealand. Playwriting and book writing are almost entirely different skills. There are obviously crossovers, but how you fold songs into a story is a specific skill.”

Musical theatre is an adaptive art form. *Hedestown* comes from mythology, *Les Misérables* from Victor Hugo’s novel, and *Hamilton* was inspired by Ron Chernow’s biography. “It’s hard enough to make the story sing,” Di Somma observes. “Why try and write an original story while you’re doing that at the same time? Adaptation is not a bad way to start.”

And there are great New Zealand stories waiting to be told. “There’s incredibly rich New Zealand subject material out there that’s yet to be adapted. Historical characters, events in our history. There’s a lot of fertile ground,” Di Somma adds.

He riffs on authenticity. “Does this show sing to you in an authentic way? Do you believe that you have the musical voice to tell this particular story? Have you got the right collaborators around you to tell that story?” Once you’ve answered those questions, he notes, “lead with your gut from there.”



ABOVE TOP: *Forest High and the Glitch in the System* by Adam Spedding and Bray Jeffrey, The Players Theatre, New York, USA. Image: Adrienne Williams.

ABOVE: Adam Spedding outside The Players Theatre, New York, 2026. Image: Madison Valentine.



THERE'S A LOT OF FERTILE GROUND

ABOVE: *Give Way – The Musical* by Steven Page, Circa Theatre, 2025.
Image: Roc+ Photography.

RIGHT: *The Bone Thief*, book and lyrics by Cassandra Tse, music by Bruno Shirley, Red Scare Theatre Company, Gryphon Theatre, 2018.
Image: Roc+ Photography.

Di Somma has had more success securing development support than most. He has been commissioned to write several new works, both musicals and operas – one of which, a large-scale commission with ATC, unfortunately never made it to the stage, nixed in part by the financial fallout from Covid. Several others have started with Creative New Zealand backing. There is a tension here though. “From a CNZ perspective, music theatre always slips through the cracks. The last time I applied, there was a little scurry-away meeting where they had to discuss whether my work fits into music or theatre.”

Di Somma went on to talk about the perception that musicals were commercial, and therefore less deserving of support. “Actually, the opposite is true.”

Spedding has realised funding from CNZ just once. Tse has had some success developing new musical work with the financial support of Wellington City Council. She’s also realistic about the context that our funders find themselves in. “We’re incredibly underfunded. CNZ do what they can, but obviously they’re so stretched.”

Tse laughs. “If I only wrote when I got paid to write, I’d have written a lot fewer things. A lot less.”

She celebrates the many artists who gift their time to new work development. Many of the artists working on the new musicals staged by her company, Red Scare, have been paid through profit share with a base fee. “We work with what we have, and we have many lovely friends that are skilled and happy to volunteer their time.”

The creators I spoke with acknowledged the support they've received from organisations such as Auckland Live, Auckland Arts Festival, PANNZ, and from leading producers and programmers such as Vanessa Immink, Bernie Haldane, Janelle Bish and Brendan Talbot. Platforms such as the Auckland Live Cabaret Season have also provided a vital outlet to road test new work in development.

Everyone had big ideas about how to push the culture forward in Aotearoa too. Citing the mentorship between Oscar Hammerstein II and his protégé Stephen Sondheim, Tse wants to see greater investment in mentors for composers. She thinks stronger connections between tertiary music and theatre programmes could also create a greater understanding of each discipline.

In the US, musicals are shepherded through development with what is called a 29-hour reading. "Actors agree to get paid basically four-fifths of fuck all to come in and read a

new show. It's part of a union agreement to ensure that new work gets put on its feet," Di Somma explains.

Di Somma wants to see more companies being proactive with their engagement. "I've only had one theatre company come to me post-*Bloody Woman* to ask what I'm working on. There isn't even really a curiosity. I think people just don't want to touch them because they are perceived to be expensive and difficult."

Resources could be better shared too, particularly with emerging writers. Di Somma advocates for professional companies offering up space, footing the bill for a pianist. This could be extended to community theatres too, identifying high-potential talent and moving their artistic practice forward. "I think there are a few barriers to entry which could, relatively inexpensively, be removed."

For most musical theatre writers, Aotearoa is too small. Spedding lives in New York, while



Di Somma and *Daffodils* writer Ro Bright live in Melbourne. Those international centres offer greater opportunity.

Spedding explains. “As much as I love making theatre in New Zealand, and I would love to do that, there is not huge support to continue it as a career. Whereas that is a possibility here.” He talks about how inspired he’s been by seeing wholly original work. “You get to see something that hasn’t been done. You get to see people make choices.”

Di Somma took some early advice from Tim Minchin: “He said to me, you just have to be where you can do the work.” He moved to Australia, conscious of how work can bounce out of the country onto the international stage. “When you’re a professional writer you are largely reliant on producers seeing your work. And in Australia, there’s just more people. It’s about size of industry and opportunities.” He’s begun to have some success, with his opera *Siegfried and Roy* playing a sellout Sydney Festival season.



“One of your first responsibilities as a practicing artist is to observe. There’s just more to see and more to observe,” Di Somma reflects. And Melbourne isn’t so far away that he can’t come back home to work either. Since relocating, he’s returned to make *The Unruly Tourists* with The Fan Brigade and New Zealand Opera, and the television musical comedy *Happiness* with longtime collaborator Kip Chapman. *Happiness* has expanded his audience reach, with distribution deals in New Zealand, Australia and the US.

MUSICALS ARE EXPENSIVE TO DEVELOP AND HARD TO PRODUCE

Most New Zealand musicals have a blink and you’ll miss it shelf life. And known IP doesn’t necessarily mean ticket sales. Musical versions of *Whale Rider* and *Once Were Warriors* were presented once and not seen again. An adaptation of the much-loved film *Came a Hot Friday* by Dean Parker and Stephen McCurdy has yet to be seen. Langford believes that “there’s room for, and an appetite for, new shows. It’s just harder to break through.”

There is a marketing issue at play. Langford reckons that audiences immediately think of “jazz hands and sequins”, which he believes puts many people off the genre. Tse agrees that we often have a “very narrow conception of what musical theatre is” and that New Zealand audiences can immediately assume that serious local work will be cringey. We need to find stronger hooks to encourage audiences to take the risk.

Tse believes that the core audience for musical theatre is different. “The sort of typical person that’s going to a musical is not the same person that’s going to see theatre in other contexts. Sometimes there



is a conservatism to that audience that doesn't exist in other forms. That's not necessarily in terms of their political beliefs, but in wanting to see something familiar."

This means that international juggernauts such as *Mamma Mia*, *Wicked* and *Jersey Boys* are regularly put in front of audiences, rather than local work. The most licensed New Zealand musicals in community theatres are *That Bloody Woman*, *Footrot Flats: The Musical* and *Love Off the Shelf*. But there are a number of titles that Playmarket staff believe are ripe for community theatre presentation: *Monarchy* delightfully skewers the Royals; *Give Way* sees a young woman make it her mission to change New Zealand's bonkers Give Way rule; *Checkout Chicks* is a high-energy comedy that celebrates loving your job; *Braindead* is a riotous splatterfest, adapted from Peter Jackson's cult film. Among other titles, they provide something at the very heart of community theatre: collective joy.

Known brands have a stranglehold on professional theatre programming too. In their main bill, Auckland Theatre Company has programmed just two New Zealand musicals in its history; The Court Theatre has programmed two in the last 25 years. The outlier is Circa Theatre, which has regularly staged new work by Gareth Farr and Paul Jenden; Micky Delahunty and Michelle Scullion; and Roger Hall, A. K. Grant

ADAPTATION IS NOT A BAD WAY TO START

ABOVE: *The Unruly Tourists*, music composed by Luke Di Somma, libretto by The Fan Brigade, New Zealand Opera and Auckland Arts Festival, Bruce Mason Centre, 2024. Image: Andi Crown Photography.

LEFT: *That Bloody Woman* by Luke Di Somma and Gregory Cooper, Auckland Theatre Company, Sky City Theatre, 2016. Image: Michael Smith.



and Philip Norman. Their last musical offering was Steven Page's *Give Way* in 2025.

Traditional theatre audiences can get a bit sniffy about musicals too. "We don't take musical theatre particularly seriously as a Western culture in general," Tse observes. "There's a mass sort of understanding that musical theatre is uncool. If you admit that you like musical theatre, you're crossing a Rubicon into a level of uncoolness."

This irritates most of the creators I spoke to. "I always hate it when people are like, 'I hate musical theatre,' because they saw *Mamma Mia* or *Cats*," says Spedding. "It's such a broad form. It's a medium, not a genre. I think if you like music and you like stories, there will be a musical that you'll like."

Risk is central. New music theatre doesn't always land with audiences. But is one box office failure with a new musical a reason to give up? Most companies wouldn't apply the same rule to new plays that don't work out. Di Somma lays down a challenge. "Are there five new musicals that have flopped for every *Bloody Woman*, or just five shows sitting out there that we haven't thought of yet?"

Di Somma considers the ongoing programming of known titles by professional companies. "Programming *Cabaret* for the third time in 25 years, as great a show as it obviously is, is not a risk-taking exercise at all. Music theatre – its very nature is risk. Risky to write, risky to produce, risky to get characters to sing. Often characters have to be put in really risky situations – you need enough heightened stakes to make the thing work. And I just think that our theatre industry, understandably, is so risk averse."

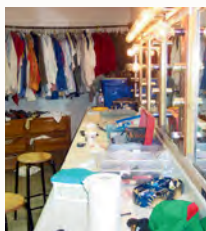
When Langford finishes his conversation with me, he asserts an artistic ambition for all writers of the form. "Make the show you want to see and go big. Find a way to do it with whatever resources you've got."

Sums it up really. Make it sing.

ABOVE: *Give Way* – *The Musical* by Steven Page, Circa Theatre, 2025. Image: Roc+ Photography.



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TĀMAKI MAKĀURAU 2025

BY CHYE-LING HUANG

2025 felt heavy, scrappy and strangely triumphant. A tumble-dryer year of survival by any means necessary, 'Survive 2025' became the tongue-in-cheek mantra no one wanted, but one that rang painfully true.

Proudly Asian Theatre's year embodied that mantra. After taking 18 months off to recover from burnout, clarify vision and tackle our business model, we returned in 2025 more internally resourced than ever, only to face a year of outward rejection unlike anything in our 13-year history. I spent the first half of the year thinking we had developed a bad smell, until I saw the bingo cards of theatre companies on Boosted. It was systemic – practitioners were desperate to kick things back into gear, but the economy was saying no. The political and literal climate got hotter, audiences were cautious, and the industry navigated a year defined by instability.

And yet, milestone highs still emerged.

Historic companies celebrated anniversaries of resilience. Charming showcase *Pitārā* honoured Prayas Theatre's 20-year legacy of South Asian theatre in Aotearoa, ending with a rallying cry for more funding. Auckland Live launched *We The Young*, a new festival dedicated to the city's tamariki. Black Creatives Aotearoa delivered the inaugural Aotearoa Festival of Black Arts, a nourishing and joyful showcase of Black diasporic excellence.

As Aotearoa's political climate matched global trends marked by attacks on Māori rights, rollbacks of environmental protections, and police scandals, programming swung between escapism and politically responsive work. When Brian Tamaki's factions stormed a library

during an Auckland Pride drag king storytime, live performance spaces became a literal battleground for the culture wars of 2025.

Unsurprisingly, theatre remained an essential mirror, agitator and space for solidarity with a sizzling thread of revolution running through the year. *ration the Queen's Veges* by Te Wehi Ratana and Tainui Tukiwaho at Te Pou was a defining work, inspired by Te Waka Hourua's blackout-poetry of the English Treaty at Te Papa. At Māngere Arts Centre, Leki Jackson-Bourke's *I Must Not Speak Niuean* delivered an unflinching interrogation of language loss.

ANNIVERSARIES OF RESILIENCE

Bless Basement Theatre, the city's pressure valve. Despite ongoing building issues and recession-era ticket sales, the venue still hosted an astonishing 31 scripted narrative works across the year, like Sean Dioneda Rivera's surreal funeral spiral *May Mga Uod Ang Utak Mo (There Are Worms in Your Brain)*, Alyssa Medel's heartbreaking Filipino ghost story *Ilang-Ilang*, and my own existential no-budget puppet show *Let It Die*. Basement's crucial role in a struggling economy was crystal clear in 2025 – a place for those starving to put up work to get their mojo back.

At Q Theatre, a run of striking works dug into messy feelings. Red Leap Theatre's *Wrest* thrashed with unbridled physical force about transformed identity in motherhood. Victor Rodger's *Black Faggot* returned, proving its continued gravity, while new works like Īhaka Martyn's *He Māori?* and Isabella McDermott's *Big Time* showcased strong emerging voices.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: *May Mga Uod Ang Utak Mo (There Are Worms in Your Brain)* by Sean Dioneda Rivera, Punctum Productions, Basement Theatre. Image: Jinki Cambronero.

A Mixtape for Maladies by Ahilan Karunaharan, Agaram Productions, Auckland Theatre Company and Auckland Arts Festival, ASB Waterfront Theatre. Image: Andi Crown Photography.

Ilang-Ilang by Alyssa Medel, Therefor, Basement Theatre. Image: John Rata Photography.

Speed is Emotional by Jo Randerson, Barbarian Productions and Silo Theatre, Q Theatre. Image: Andi Crown Photography.

Mā by Jonjon Tolovae, Auckland Pride Festival, Q Theatre. Image: Havea Latu.

Wrest by Red Leap Theatre, Q Theatre. Image: Yin-Chi Lee.

Genuine and Stable by Uhyoung Choi, Proudly Asian Theatre, Herald Theatre. Image: John Rata Photography.

From Another Woman by Sam Brooks, Smoke Labours Productions, Basement Theatre. Image: Jinki Cambronero.

I Must Not Speak Niuean by Lekia Jackson-Bourke, Strictly Brown, Māngere Arts Centre. Image: Anric Sitanilei.

D.R.A.G. (Dressed Resembling a God) by Daniel Williams and Sophie Roberts with Adena Delights, Hugo Grrrl and Slay West, Silo Theatre, Q Theatre. Image: Andi Crown Photography.

PAGE 84: *Tiri: Te Araroa Woman Far Walking* by Witi Ihimaera, bilingual adaptation by Witi Ihimaera, Katie Wolfe and Maioha Allen, He Kopara – Ta Haare Williams, Auckland Theatre Company, ASB Waterfront Theatre. Image: Andi Crown Photography.

On a larger scale, Ahilan Karunaharan's deceptively bubbly *A Mixtape for Maladies* for the Auckland Arts Festival completed his epic trilogy with a gut-punch, landing the impact of Sri Lanka's civil war.

Silo Theatre captured the zeitgeist through playfulness. Jo Randerson's *Speed is Emotional* was an unhinged, form-bending and alive conversation on neurodivergence. *Taniwha* brought puppetry and wonder, while *D.R.A.G. (Dressed Resembling a God)* was messy but joyous.

The opposite of the zeitgeist (I wasn't the only one gagged that a play with the word 'Orient' in the title was greenlit in 2025), Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* became the fastest-selling show in Auckland Theatre Company's history, confirming audiences' appetite for familiarity and spectacle. Yet a new Roger Hall and a showy *Romeo and Juliet* did nothing to prepare audiences for the whiplash of *Tiri: Te Araroa Woman Far Walking*. Witi Ihimaera's reimagined classic, directed by Katie Wolfe and performed by Miriama McDowell and Ni Dekkers-Reihana, was nothing short of historic. It felt like a cleansing fire, bringing unflinching pain, warmth and reckoning. Full credit to ATC for trusting their audience with a work so confrontational and reo-heavy; *Tiri*'s stake in the ground was a lightning bolt, a wero and a point of no return.

With funding sucked dry, partnerships became a defining survival strategy. Auckland Live was a knockout example as one of Auckland's biggest infrastructure supporters of diverse and independent companies. Te Pou continued to punch above its weight, an engine room and superconnector. Notably, *Siblings* featured an all-disabled cast and effortlessly pushed disability-led storytelling further into the light. Equity New Zealand improved and clarified base wages at ATC, a hopeful sign that sustainability may be built collectively or not at all.

While many were happy to see the back of 2025, the year held moments of deep pride and resistance. The staged reading of Zimbabwean playwright Stanley Makuwe's *I Am Tungsten* became a poignant final gift before his passing. Following his reading, Makuwe, who had navigated war, poverty, illness and a struggling industry, threw down a challenge: "What is your war name? In the face of death, will you go softly, or will you say 'fuck that'?"

2025 did not break us. Auckland theatre may be economically fragile, but its creative guts are alive, tenacious and thrashing into the unknown.

THEATRE CALENDAR 2025

Professional Productions of Aotearoa Plays 1 January 2025 – 31 December 2025.

These listings focus on professional productions of scripted narrative and devised theatre works only. Other live performance forms such as dance, cabaret, stand-up and sketch comedy, live art, circus and improv are not included here, nor are readings or development seasons.

TOURING & INTERNATIONAL

A Beautiful Noise
book by Anthony
McCarten
music and lyrics by Neil
Diamond
USA Tour ongoing

*The Complete Voyage
of the RMS Titanic*
(in 90 Minutes)
Darlene Mohekey,
Dan Pengelly and
Lizzie Tollemache
Christchurch Botanic
Gardens 9 – 26 Jan
Centrepont Theatre
29 Mar – 12 Apr

Aya and the Butterfly
Bridget and
Roger Sanders
Birdlife Productions
Wellington City Libraries
Tour 16 – 26 Jan
Hamilton Arts Festival,
Wairarapa Arts Festival
1 – 9 Mar
Wānaka Festival of
Colour, Arts on Tour
1 – 26 Apr
Tararua Tramping Club
Wellington 20 – 26 Sep

Supping with the Devil
Jan Bolwell
Te Raukura ki Kāpiti
24 Jan
Dunedin Fringe
20 – 22 Mar
BATS 8 – 12 Apr

Sí Sí Sí
Eleanor Bishop and
Karin McCracken
translated by
Màrius Serra

Teatre De L'Aurora
Barcelona, Spain
Touring Production
6 Feb – 13 Apr,
17 Oct – 18 Dec
*GOMIL: Grumpy Old
Man in Lycra*
Gregory Cooper
Isaac Theatre Royal
Christchurch 10 – 21 Feb
NZ Tour 18 Sep – 18 Oct

Antonio!
William Duignan, Andy
Manning and Ania Upstill
NZ Fringe, Hamilton Arts
Festival 14 – 28 Feb
Adelaide Fringe,
Basement Theatre
11 – 22 Mar

A Master of None:
Brown Fala
Lila Crichton
NZ Fringe 14 – 16 Feb
Kia Mau Festival
30 – 31 May
Hawke's Bay Arts Festival
12 Oct
Black Box Theatre,
Papa Hou Christchurch
29 – 30 Oct

Guru of Chai
Jacob Rajan and
Justin Lewis
Hamilton Arts Festival
21 – 22 Feb
Great Lake Centre
Theatre Taupō 4 Jul
Forum North Whangārei
26 – 27 Jul
Hawke's Bay Arts Festival
11 Oct

*Therapy: A Musical
Comedy*
Chelsea McRae and

Mario Sadra-de Jong
NZ Fringe, Aubyn Live
Theatre Hastings, Globe
Theatre Palmerston
North 25 Feb – 8 Mar
Basement
8 – 12 Jul

Green Fingered
Donna Brookbanks
Hamilton Arts Festival
26 Feb
Dunedin Fringe
13 – 15 Mar
Q Theatre 6 – 10 May

He Māori?
Īhaka Martyn
Hamilton Arts Festival
26 Feb
Wānaka Festival
2 Apr

Taki Rua Schools Tour
5 – 6 May
Q Theatre 7 – 9 Aug
Melbourne Fringe Festival
8 – 10 Oct

How to Art
Katie Burson and Georgie
Llewellyn
NZ Fringe 26 Feb – 1 Mar
Basement 17 – 19 Jul
Melbourne Fringe
8 – 19 Oct

Māori Krishna
Hone Taukiri
Hamilton Arts Festival
27 Feb
Factory Theatre
Onehunga, BATS
26 Mar – 5 Apr

Bottom Surgery
Lily Catastrophe
NZ Fringe, Nelson Fringe,
Dunedin Fringe
27 Feb – 22 Mar
BATS 13 – 17 May

Basement
25 – 29 Nov

Steiner and the Snake
Robert Düssler
NZ Fringe, Nelson Fringe
27 Feb – 9 Mar

Yes Yes Yes
Eleanor Bishop and
Karin McCracken
EBKM
Canadian Tour
28 Feb – 14 Mar
Carnegie Mellon
University, Pittsburgh
USA 16 – 18 Mar
Australian Tour
29 Apr – 24 Jun
Nelson Arts Festival
23 Oct

Mrs Krishnan's Party
Jacob Rajan and
Justin Lewis
Indian Ink
USA Tour
28 Feb – 10 Apr,
6 – 8 Jun

Suitcase Show
Ralph McCubbin Howell
Trick of the Light
PANNZ Tour, Auckland
Arts Festival
28 Feb – 5 Apr
Q Theatre
10 – 12 Jul

Tangihana
Kristyl Neho
Hamilton Arts Festival
28 Feb – 1 Mar
The Rose Centre
Auckland
26 – 27 Jun
North Island Tour
31 Aug – 24 Oct

<i>The Tiny Show</i> Tomasin Fisher-Johnson Company of Giants NZ Fringe, Dunedin Fringe 1 – 16 Mar Auckland Writers Festival 17 – 18 May <i>End of Summer Time</i> Roger Hall Centrepoint, Circa 1 Mar – 13 Apr <i>Roadkill: The Uber-Cool Musical</i> Tom Knowles National Tour 4 – 26 Mar Basement 3 – 7 Sep, 24 – 28 Sep Reimagine Festival 9 – 12 Oct <i>Love; Mum</i> Sela Faletolu-Fasi BATS, Little Andromeda, Basement 4 – 29 Mar <i>Rubber Gloves: The Glad Rags Story</i> Jennifer Currie Nelson Fringe 6 – 8 Mar Village Theatre Takaka 3 Apr Little Andromeda 18 – 19 Jul <i>The Messy Magic Adventure</i> David Ladderman and Lizzie Tollemache Adelaide Fringe 8 – 23 Mar Edinburgh Fringe 1 – 17 Aug <i>Jekyll and Hyde</i> A Slightly Isolated Dog Australian Tour 11 Mar – 21 Jun <i>Manage Your Expectations</i> Eliza Sanders Adelaide Fringe 11 – 16 Mar Dunedin Fringe 19 Mar Tahi Festival 16 – 20 Sep <i>Eat, Sleep, Dance, Repeat</i> Riley Brebner Basement 11 – 15 Mar Little Andromeda 6 – 8 Nov <i>Nicola Cheeseman is Back</i> Kathryn Burnett	Plumb Theatre Q Theatre 11 – 16 Mar Reimagine Festival, Tauranga Arts Festival 11 Oct – 1 Nov <i>Two Guitars</i> Jamie McCaskill Tikapa Productions Te Raukura ki Kāpiti, Wairapa Arts Festival 12 – 14 Mar <i>ration the Queen's veges</i> Te Wehi Ratana and Tainui Tukiwaho Te Pou Theatre Auckland Arts Festival 12 – 16 Mar Circa, Tahi Festival, Aronui Indigenous Arts Festival 16 Aug – 21 Sep Nelson Arts Festival 26 Oct <i>Ophelia Thinks Harder</i> Jean Betts and W Shakespeare Fingerless Theatre KXT on Broadway Sydney 14 – 29 Mar <i>No No No</i> Ella Yiannoutsos South Island Tour 20 Mar – 6 Apr <i>Igen! Igen! Igen!</i> Eleanor Bishop and Karin McCracken translated by Rupp Anikó Kolibri Színház Budapest, Hungary 22 March <i>Talofa Papa</i> Kasiano Mita Baycourt Tauranga 23 Mar <i>Wahine Mātātoa: The (Mostly) True Story of Erihāpeti Pātahi</i> Cindy Diver Theatreworks and Wow Productions Dunedin Arts Festival, Wānaka Festival 27 Mar – 1 Apr <i>Mr Red Light</i> Carl Bland Nightson	Due Drop Events Centre Auckland, Herald Theatre 26 – 30 Mar Australian Tour 27 Jun – 12 Jul <i>AltarNative</i> Acacia O'Connor Factory Theatre Onehunga, BATS 26 Mar – 5 Apr <i>Up and Away</i> Cubbin Theatre Company Générations Lumineuses Marseilles, France 28 – 29 Mar We The Young, Auckland Live 16 – 21 Sep The Arts Centre Christchurch 5 – 9 Nov <i>Speed is Emotional</i> Jo Randerson Barbarian Productions Wānaka Festival of Colour, Dunedin Arts Festival 31 Mar – 2 Apr Silo Theatre 16 Apr – 3 May <i>Olive Copperbottom</i> Penny Ashton Stratford Shakespeare Festival 4 Apr <i>Be Like Billy?</i> Rutene Spooner Wānaka Festival 4 Apr Taranaki Right Royal Cabaret Festival 12 Jun <i>Upu</i> Curated by Grace Iwashita-Taylor Dunedin Arts Festival, Wānaka Festival Theatre Royal Nelson 5 – 11 Apr Sydney Opera House 7 – 10 May <i>The Trojan War</i> A Slightly Isolated Dog Australian Tour 10 Apr – 14 Jun <i>Kitchen Chaos</i> David Ladderman and Lizzie Tollemache Rollicking Entertainment Circa 15 – 26 Apr	Wairarapa Events Centre, Te Raukura ki Kāpiti 2 – 5 Jul The Court Theatre 23 Sep – 4 Oct <i>Voices from Gallipoli</i> Mark Wright North Island Tour 17 Apr – 3 May <i>I Didn't Invite You Here to Lecture Me</i> Amy Mansfield Te Auaha 6 – 8 May Q Theatre 21 – 24 May The Arts Centre Christchurch 29 May <i>Me, My Mother and Suzy Cato</i> Florence Hartigan Herald Theatre, BATS 8 – 24 May Toitōi 14 Aug <i>Merely Beloved</i> Shoshana McCallum Herald Theatre, BATS 8 – 24 May <i>Sorry for Your Loss</i> Cian Parker Yirramboi Melbourne 9 – 10 May The Meteor 23, 30 Jul Oneonesix 15 – 16 Aug Prismatic Arts Festival Tour, Canada 22 – 26 Sep <i>The Tempestuous</i> Penny Ashton New Plymouth Little Theatre 16 – 17 May Saskatoon Fringe, Winnipeg Fringe, Canada 11 – 27 Jul Camden Fringe London UK 7 – 9 Aug Staveley Roundhouse Cumbria UK 14 Aug TAPAC 30 Oct – 2 Nov Regent Theatre Dunedin 6 Dec <i>The Bookbinder</i> Ralph McCubbin Howell Trick of the Light Dream Big Children's Festival Adelaide 17 May Oneonesix 15 – 16 Jul Books&Co Ōtaki 8 Aug
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Black Faggot

Victor Rodger
The Court, Q Theatre
17 May – 29 Jun

Back to Square One?

Anders Falstie-Jensen
The Rebel Alliance
Auckland Writers Festival
18 May
Turner Centre Kerikeri
2 Dec

Wrest

Red Leap
Oneonesix 29 – 31 May
Q Theatre 6 – 14 Jun

Waenga

Hariata and
Tamati Moriarty
Hurō Productions and
Te Rākau Hua o
Te Wao Tapu
Kia Mau Festival
30 May – 1 Jun
Aotea College Porirua
24 – 25 Sep

Promise and Promiscuity

Penny Ashton
Australian Tour
6 – 29 Jun

Heartbreak Hotel

Karin McCracken
EBKM
Rising Festival
Melbourne
10 – 22 Jun
Soho Theatre London, UK
19 – 23 Aug
Circa, Nelson Arts
Festival, Tauranga Arts
Festival 14 – 1 Nov

Sugar

Ro Bright
Bullet Heart Club
Adelaide Cabaret Festival,
Hayes Theatre Sydney
14 – 20 Jun
Arts Centre Melbourne
30 Jun
Edinburgh Fringe
30 Jul – 24 Aug
Brisbane Powerhouse
31 Oct – 1 Nov

A Mixtape for Maladies

Ahlan Karunaharan
Preksha Art and Culture
and Signature Group

Masks and Muses

Theatre Festival,
Castle Hill Australia
14 – 15 Jun

Ngā Reta

Te Huamanuka
Luiten-Apirana
Turner Centre Kerikeri
14 Jun

*All the Things I Wish I
Could Be*

Tom Knowles and
Jed Parsons
Circa 1 – 12 Jul
Reimagine Festival,
Nelson Arts Festival,
Tauranga Arts Festival
11 Oct – 1 Nov

Scenes from a

Yellow Peril
Nathan Joe
The Reaction Theory
Cremorne Theatre QPAC
Brisbane 3 – 12 Jul

*Before We Slip Beneath
the Sea*

Cassandra Tse
Red Scare Theatre
Company
North Island Tour
5 – 19 Jul

The Ballad of Briar Grant

Jack McGee
Squash Co. Arts
Collective
BATS, Basement, Globe
Theatre Palmerston
North, Toitoti Hastings,
Little Andromeda
8 Jul – 6 Aug

Kōpū

Tuakoi Ohia
Te Rēhia Theatre
The Court
16 – 26 Jul

Rere Atu Taku Poi!

Bea Joblin
adapted from the book
by Tangaroa Paul
Taki Rua
National Tour
18 Jul – 12 Sep

*RangGheli: The Bhavai
Saga...*

Shailesh Prajapati

Basement 22 – 26 Jul

Q Theatre 11 – 12 Oct

*Mr and Mrs Macbeth
of Duart Valley Road*

Gregory Cooper
Toitoti 23 – 24 Jul

Te Tangi a te Tūi

Amber Curreen and
Tainui Tukiwaho
Te Pou Theatre and
The Dust Palace
PANNZ North Island Tour
6 – 23 Aug

*Paradise or the
Impermanence of Ice
Cream*

Jacob Rajan and
Justin Lewis
Indian Ink
Theatre Royal Nelson,
Regent Theatre
Dunedin 29 Aug – 5 Sep

Waiting for Gertie!

Helen Moulder
National Tour
3 Sep – 9 Nov

Running into the Sun

Nadiyah Akbar and Ben
Ashby
a2 Company
Hawea Flat Hall Wānaka,
The Arts Centre
Christchurch,
Basement, Te Auaha
7 Sep – 4 Oct

Werewolf

Binge Culture
Reimagine Festival 18 Oct

Te Kuia me te

Pūngāwerewere
Patricia Grace, adapted
by Jamie McCaskill
Taki Rua
Te Waipounamu Tour
20 Oct – 13 Nov

The Griegol

Ralph McCubbin Howell
Trick of the Light
The Hannah, Tauranga
Arts Festival
24 – 28 Oct

King of the Scouts

Alex Medland
Edinburgh Horror Festival
28 – 30 Oct

Out the Gate

Helen Pearse-Otene
Te Rākau Hua o
Te Wao Tapu
Te Ūpoko o te Ika Ika
29 Oct – 15 Nov

Spark Live

Charlotte Nightingale
Glass Ceiling Arts
Collective
The Court 4 – 6 Nov

WHANGĀREI**OneOneSix**

*The Girl Whose Twin
Was a Bird*
Talia Pua
29 Sep

Blue Garden

Tomasin Fisher-Johnson
and Thomas Gowing
11 – 12 Oct

TĀMAKI MAKAUURAU**Auckland Theatre Company**

A Mixtape for Maladies
Ahilan Karunaharan
co-produced with
Agaram Productions and
Auckland Arts Festival
ASB Waterfront Theatre
4 – 23 Mar

End of Summer Time

Roger Hall
ASB Waterfront Theatre
17 Jun – 5 Jul

Mary: The Birth of

Frankenstein
Jess Sayer
ASB Waterfront Theatre
21 Aug – 7 Sep

Monster of the Week

Leo Gene Peters, Dan
Goodwin, Nathan Joe and
Jane Yonge
ATC Youth Company
Basement 1 – 4 Oct

Tiri: Te Araroa Woman

Far Walking
Witi Ihimaera
bilingual adaptation by
Witi Ihimaera, Katie Wolfe
and Maioha Allen
He Kōpara – Tā Haare

Williams
ASB Waterfront Theatre
4 – 23 Nov

Basement Theatre

Before We Begin
Hamish Annan
25 Feb – 1 Mar

From Another Woman
Sam Brooks
27 Feb – 1 Mar

Chrome Dome and Schizo
Dan Goodwin
11 – 15 Mar

My Clowns, My Circus
Janaye Henry and Sean
Dioneda Rivera
25 – 29 Mar

The Play That Gets Louder
Theo Shakes
Black Creatives Aotearoa
8 – 12 Apr

Snart
Luka Piripi
3 – 7 Jun

Survive
Adam Burrell, Vincent
Farane and Nanu
Turner-Sarah
24 – 28 Jun

F.ART
Oscar Fitzgerald,
Aidan O'Malley and
Lachie Oliver-Kerby
1 – 5 Jun

HuMan Lessons
Adam Rohe
29 Jul – 2 Aug

My Al Twin
Shirin Brown
29 Jul – 2 Aug

Tafatolu
Nikeidrian Lologa-Peters
12 – 16 Aug

May Mga Uod Ang Utak
Mo (There Are Worms in Your Brain)
Sean Dioneda Rivera
28 – 30 Aug

Let It Die
Chye-Ling Huang
2 – 6 Sep

Scorned
Peter Burman
9 – 13 Sep

Pussy Play
Indigo Paul
23 – 27 Sep

Confession
Riley Brebner
23 – 27 Sep

Backwards in High Heels
Stuart Hoar
14 – 18 Oct

Ilang-Ilang
Alyssa Medel
28 Oct – 1 Nov

Silo Theatre

Taniwha
Leon Radojkovic
Herald Theatre
26 Jun – 13 Jul

D.R.A.G. (Dressed Resembling a God)
Daniel Williams and
Sophie Roberts with
Adena Delights, Hugo
Grrrl and Slay West
Q Theatre 13 Nov – 6 Dec

Te Pou Theatre

Siblings
Pelenakeke Brown,
Roka Bunyan, Barnie
Duncan, Jordan Kareroa,
Kiriana Sheree and Dazz
Whiphey 24 – 28 Jul

Hardcase Hori Housie
Rutene Spooner 12 Sep

Kua Rewa Te Aihikirimi
Amber Curreen
Schools Tour
10 – 28 Nov

Hora Ngā Whetu
Tūrongo Collective
2 – 4 Dec

Auckland Live

Pipi Paopao
Rutene Spooner
We The Young
27 – 28 Sep

Po' Boys and Oysters
Estelle Chout
Black Creatives Aotearoa

Herald Theatre
22 – 29 Nov

Genuine and Stable
Uhyoung Choi
Proudly Asian Theatre
Herald Theatre
9 – 13 Dec

Māngere Arts Centre

The Wizard of Ōtāhuhu
Devised by the company
19 – 26 Apr

I Must Not Speak Niuean
Leki Jackson-Bourke
Strictly Brown
12 – 13 Dec

The Pumphouse

Pretty Legal
Faith Ward
Auckland Pride
19 – 21 Feb

The Golden Ass
Michael Hurst with
Fiona Samuel
15 – 21 Jun

Q Theatre

Mā
Jonjon Tolovae
Auckland Pride
25 Feb – 1 Mar

Colour Me Cecily
Bea Lee-Smith
7 – 9 Aug

Big Time
Isabella McDermott
16 – 18 Oct

Life on a Loop
Ellie Smith
Peach Theatre
Company
20 – 24 Sep

H.R. The Musical #2
Amy Mansfield
25 Nov – 6 Dec

TAPAC

Old McDonald and the Tippy Tappity Rabbit
Sarah Somerville
30 Jun – 4 Jul

The Very Odd and Unusual Egg

Sarah Somerville
22 – 26 Sep

Pitārā
curated by
Ankita Singh
Prayas
5 – 7 Nov

Balloon Dog
Jacob Rajan and
Justin Lewis
Indian Ink
22 – 30 Nov

Other Venues

A Rich Man
Sam Brooks
Old Folks Association
5 – 9 Aug

Multiple Seasons

What Happened to Mary-Anne?
Brady Peeti
Auckland Pride
11 – 15 Feb
Kōanga Festival
19 – 21 Sep

Shark in a Boat
Geoff Allen
Pitt St Theatre,
The Rose Centre
27 Feb – 14 Mar

Te Tupua – The Goblin
John Davies
Regional Tour
15 Mar – 27 Apr

KIRIKIRIROA

The Meteor

Kare Tao
Ati Jensen-Whakataka,
Michael Moore,
Whetu Silver and
Kauri Williams
14 Jun

The Last Thing We Build
Melanie Allison
29 Oct – 2 Nov

Hamilton Arts Festival 21 Feb – 2 Mar

The Anthony Wilding Show
Matthew Chamberlain; *Blue Eyes*
April Phillips; *H.R. The Musical*
Amy Mansfield

TE PAPAIOEA

Centrepont Theatre

The KaRs Go Barmy in Palmy
Kane Parsons and
Regan Taylor
14 – 17 Apr

Mr and Mrs Macbeth of Moonshine Valley Road
Gregory Cooper
28 Jun – 20 Jul

Felding Market Fiasco
Alison Quigan
15 Nov – 13 Dec

TE WHANGANUI-A-TARA

Circa Theatre

Sleeping Beauty – The Pantomime
Simon Leary and
Gavin Rutherford
2 – 11 Jan

Hope
Jenny Patrick
24 Jan – 23 Feb

Give Way – The Musical
Steven Page
25 Apr – 24 May

Re-Engineered
Regan Taylor
9 – 24 May

Kiwi's Big Hararei
Catriona Tipene and
Ryan Cundy
Horse With No Name
23 Sep – 4 Oct

Robin Hood – The Pantomime
Simon Leary and
Gavin Rutherford
12 Nov – 21 Dec

The End of the Golden Weather and Not Christmas, but Guy Fawkes
Bruce Mason
Brilliant Adventures
19 Nov – 13 Dec

BATS

idk: Angst and Hormones
Anna Secker
18 – 22 Mar

Whose Memory Lights the Dark
Natala Gwiazdzinski
2 – 5 Apr

Escaping
Adam Burrell
2 – 5 Apr

My Puppet Who Sighs in Pearl Shavings
Raven Havey-Lomas
8 – 12 Jul

Inpatient or How I Spent My Summer Vacation
Sarah Andrews Reynolds
2 – 5 Sep

Squawk
Wellington Young Actors
4 – 6 Sep

One Bedroom Available in Super Friendly Definitely Not Scary Flat \$280 Per Week Excluding Expenses
Jackson Burling and
Hannah Doogan
7 – 12 Oct

The Butler Did It
Isabella Murray and
Revena Correll Trnka
14 – 18 Oct

Messy
Tara Weston-Webb
4 – 8 Nov

Skwert: The Reunion
Elliott Lam, Keegan
Thomas, Lily Catastrophe,
Q Potts, Mo Munn and
Aaron Douglas
11 – 15 Nov

Six Degrees Festival 25 Nov – 6 Dec

A Hardware Love Affair
Lizzie Bysouth and
Sophie Helm;
Homebodies
Bronya
Davies and Stella Vaiva;
Strays
Pan Clark; *Youtide*
Teddy O'Neill

Dark Matter
Chris Robertson
9 – 13 Dec

Frankenstein
Calvin Petersen and
Alessandro Visentin
16 – 20 Dec

Kia Mau Festival 30 May – 14 Jun

Aiga Lusi Faiva; *The Aotearoans*
Ihaka Martyn; *'Avaiki Nui Social Returns*
curated by Miria George; *The Handlers*
Poata Alvie McKree; *He Ingoa*
Raureti Ormond; *Ka Rere*
kā Kupu Hinemoana
Baker, Ada Duffy, Liam
Jacobson, Josiah Morgan
and Dr Ruby Solly; *Ka Tito Au*
Apirana Taylor; *Love Letterz*
curated by Cadence Chung;
On God
Kaisa Fa'atui; *A Short History of Asian New Zealand Theatre*
Nathan Joe; *Tūr Girls*
Michaela Steel; *WTF: What the Fa'afafine!?! Hibiscus*
Tupua-Wilson

NZ Fringe Festival 14 Feb – 8 Mar

Anxiety... The Musical!?
Maria Williams; *Aphrodisiac*
Tim Fraser; *Below the Worms*
Sugar Rea-Bruce and Te Ata Tu Patalesio;
Compromise
Mitchell Botting, Emilie Hope,
Jill Kwan, Jack McGee, Ihaka Martyn,
Evangelina Telfar, Ella Yiannoutsos
and Nuanzhi Zheng; *Death, Ray*
Zachary Klein; *Dictionary*
Nathan King; *Doormat*
Sarah Lawrence and S.L.U.G.; *The Fabulous Fabelinskys*
Rachel Winter Hase; *Fairies Playing Football*
Sarah Penny; *For You to Know and Me to Find Out*
Olivia Tennet; *Gauntlet Prom – The Musical*
Kaisa Costanza-van Den Belt;
Hey Siri
Micky Delahunty and Jono Weston;
Jim's No Cowboy
Sophie Maree; *The King in Yellow*
Simon Burgess; *The Last Crime*
Ethan Cranefield and Jamie Honey; *Mic Drop*
Ayush Aditya and Marcus Savelio;
Oh Substance
Ezra Prattley; *Papa Whitney*
Nicholls-

Potts; *Riding Waves*, *Growing Roots*
Sara Perenise-Ropeti and John Ulu; *The Self Possessed*
Glenn McKenzie; *Sing Me the Sweetest Songs*
Josie Eastwood; *Three Feet Under*
Helen Varley Jamieson; *Whanake*
Te Ezra Jones-Moki, Tiaki Sharp,
Miren Duffett and Moata Albrecht

Tahi Festival 9 – 19 Sep

Chloe's Revenge
Chloe Bettina; *Grass Roots*
Raureti Ormond; *Over and Out*
Jackson Burling; *Social Animal*
Stephen Papps and Damon Andrews;
There Once Was a Boy...
Robert Lloyd

Other Venues

Badjelly the Witch
adapted by Alannah O'Sullivan from the book by
Spike Milligan
KidzStuff
Tararua Tramping Club
12 – 25 Apr

Party Pigs
Peter Wilson
KidzStuff
20 – 26 Sep

The Haka Party Incident
Katie Wolfe
Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School
Te Whaea
16 – 25 Oct

Farrago Bazaar
Cassandra Tse
Red Scare Theatre Company
Innermost Gardens
22 Nov

The Man Whose Mother Was a Pirate – The Musical
adapted by Nino Raphael from the book by
Margaret Mahy
The Hannah
5 – 14 Dec

Multiple Seasons

Murder on the Dance Floor
Corrie Milne
NZ Fringe 14 – 16 Feb
BATS 25 – 29 Mar

This Wasn't the Plan
Glenn Horsfall
NZ Fringe 14 – 28 Feb
Tahi Festival 12 Sept

*A Show for When You
Feel Lonely*
James Wenley
NZ Fringe 15 Feb – 3 Mar
Tahi Festival 10 – 17 Sep

Guy Gunn: Beast Basher
Mitchell Botting
NZ Fringe 24 – 26 Feb
BATS 11 – 14 Mar

Don't Look Now
Angie Farrow
Regional Tour
26 Feb – 5 Apr

The Home Inside
Emma Rattenbury
Wonderlight Theatre
Aotearoa
Regional Tour
26 Jun – 10 Jul

WHAKATŪ

Nelson Fringe Festival 6 – 15 Mar

Blip Isaac Hooper; *Cheese
Wraps and Blueberries*
Nikkie Karki; *The Elephant
in the Room* Breffni
O'Rourke; *Frankenstein*
Abridged Antics; *My Life
is Based on a True Story*
Heather Lindsay; *Passing*
Through Alison Cowan

ŌTAUHAHI

The Court Theatre

*Crash Bash: Know
the Limits*
Brendon Bennetts
with Jorja Baylee and
Bradley Mutch
Schools Tour
17 Feb – 21 Mar

*The End of the
Golden Weather*
Bruce Mason, adapted

by Raymond Hawthorne
3 May – 7 Jun

End of Summer Time
Roger Hall
21 Jun – 16 Aug

Nuku and Vai
Juanita Hepi and
Talia-Rae Mavaega
Schools Tour
18 Aug – 19 Sep

It Happened on a Tuesday
Devised by Hester Ulliyart
and The Court Youth
Company
4 – 6 Dec

Little Andromeda

The Boy Who Cried Wolf
Gregory Cooper
2 – 4 Jul

*Bobby Wood: If You
Met My Mum, You'd
Understand*
Tess Sullivan and
Jonathan Price
7 – 9 Aug

E Ipo, My Love
Gisele Proud and
Tane Te Pakeke-Patterson
19 – 20 Aug

The Meeting
Lola Houghton
17 – 18 Oct

Coffin Ship
Bryn Sparks
29 Oct – 1 Nov

A Christchurch Carol
Gregory Cooper
4 – 20 Dec

Cubbin Theatre Company

Bundle Baby
The Arts Centre –
Te Matatiki Toi Ora
5 – 8 Jun

Me and My Nana
The Arts Centre –
Te Matatiki Toi Ora
24 – 27 Jul

Sportsball
The Arts Centre –
Te Matatiki Toi Ora
25 – 28 Sep

Other Venues

The Passionate Puritan
Peter Falkenberg
Free Theatre
The Pumphouse
16 – 18 Oct

Faust on Trial
Pedro Ilgenfritz,
Jonty Coulson and
Josiah Morgan
Te Wā 6 – 8 Nov

ŌTEPOTI

Dunedin Arts Festival 26 Mar – 6 Apr

The Anderson
Localisation Martyn
Roberts, David O'Donnell,
Hilary Halba, David
Hutchinson, Doug Dittford
and Amanda Faye Martin

Dunedin Fringe 11 – 23 Mar

All Heroes Sarah Barham;
Babyface Nick Tipa; *The
Battle Against Volkenmort*
Julia Godfrey; *A Fly on
the Wall* Jackson Rosie;
Margot's Bench Lindsey
Brown; *Rare Public*
Appearance of Miss
Georgette Heyer Terry
MacTavish

New Athenaeum Theatre

Red Heavens
Martine Baanvinger
4 Sep

Other Venues

The Neurospice Girls
Lizzie Tollemache
Hic Sunt Dragones
24 Filleul Street
23 – 27 Jul

WĀNAKA

Wanaka Festival of Colour

*MIQ – Stuck in the
Middle with You*
Anna Barden-Shaw and
Robyn Bardas
Mount Aspiring College
Theatre 2 – 5 Apr

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. We run masterclasses; hold playwriting competitions and awards annually; and publish plays and best practice guidelines. Our bookshop stocks 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 licences issued: 43

Community performance licences issued: 84

International licences issued: 16

School/tertiary performance licences issued: 133

Scripts circulated: 5370

Scripts/drafts received: 353

Paid script assessments: 3

PUBLISHING

Traces | Tea by Ahilan Karunaharan,
Yang/Young/杨 by Sherry Zhang and
 Nuanzhi Zheng, *Krishnan's Dairy* by Jacob
 Rajan, *Scenes from a Yellow Peril* by
 Nathan Joe | Foreword: Rosabel Tan | Series
 Editor: Shane Boshier | Design: Cansino & Co |
 Editing and Production: Whitireia Publishing

Playmarket Guidelines 08: He Reo,
He Mauri, He Mana: Te Reo Māori Theatre
 nā Tainui Tukiwaho and Hōhepa Waitoa |
 Editors: Murray Lynch and Shane Boshier |
 Design: Cansino & Co

Playmarket Annual

Editor: Shane Boshier | Design: Cansino & Co |
 Editorial Assistant: Murray Lynch

eBulletin

Published monthly via email. News and
 opportunities for those interested in Aotearoa
 plays | Editor: Shane Boshier

edBulletin

Published biannually via email. Resources
 and opportunities for teachers and educators
 Editors: Ihaka Martyn and Shane Boshier

AWARDS, COMPETITIONS AND PROJECTS

Bruce Mason Award Winner:

Anders Falstie-Jensen

**Adam NZ Play Award Winner, Best Play
 by a Māori Playwright and Best Play by
 a Woman Playwright:** *We're Gonna Kill Billy*
 Alex Medland

Best Play by a Pasifika Playwright: *Wet*
 Tūi Matelau

McNaughton South Island Play Award:



The Consummate Professional Andrew Todd and Cathasaigh Ó Fiannachta

Playwrights b4 25 Winner: *Quitters*
Viki Moananu

Plays for the Young Competition: *Kiwi's Big Hararei* Catriona Tipene and Ryan Cundy (3-8 year olds), *Matariki and the Space Pirates* Sally Sutton (8-12 year olds), *Wahine Mātātoa: The (Mostly) True Story of Erihāpeti Pātahi* Cindy Diver

Brown Ink Development Programme:
The Legend of Pam and Terry Mycah Keall and Nathan Mudge, *Te Tau E* Ngahiriwa Rauhina

Asian Ink Development Programme:
The Girl Whose Twin Was a Bird Talia Pua

Theatremakers Programme: *Mic Drop*
Ayush Aditya and Marcus Savelio

Te Hono/Connection: Courtney Bassett and Ralph McCubbin Howell; Sam Brooks and Allison Horsley; Alex de Vries and Nathan Joe; Beth Kayes, Anna Marbrook and Philippa Campbell; Mycah Keall, Nathan Mudge and Regan Taylor; Zachary Klein and Conrad

Newport; Renee Liang and Jane Yonge; Jack McGee and Jason Te Kare; Leilani Tamu and Fasitua Amosa; Sherry Zhang, Nuanzhi Zheng and Ahilan Karunaharan

Creative New Zealand Playmarket Moana Pacific Trainee Script Advisor Residency:
Stacey Leilua

Playwrights in Schools programme with Read NZ Te Pou Muramura:
Dave Armstrong, Victor Rodger

Robert Lord Writers' Cottage Residencies:
Geoff Bonning, Elena de Roo, Micky Delahunty, Tracy Farr, Chye-Ling Huang, Gail Ingram, Joshua Iosefo, Hazel Phillips, Stacey Teague, Nick Tipa, Annie Villiers, Dani Yourukova

Te Arero Toi: Produced by Kōanga Festival

CLINICS, SCRIPT ADVISORY, READINGS AND WORKSHOPS

Suitcase Show Ralph McCubbin Howell, *'akakino* Benny Marama, *Wet Tūi* Matelau, *Give Way – The Musical* Steven Page,

A Good Winter Desiree Gezentsvey, *Prised* Emily Duncan, *I Am Tungsten* Stanley Makuwe (with Auckland Theatre Company), *Mic Drop* Ayush Aditya and Marcus Savelio, Workshop for Te Tai Tokerau Playwrights

Playmarket Playfellow: Alister McDonald

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PREVIOUS PAGE: Nathan Joe at the 2025 Adam NZ Play Awards. Image: Philip Merry.

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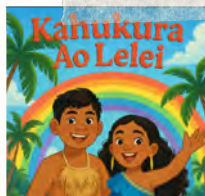


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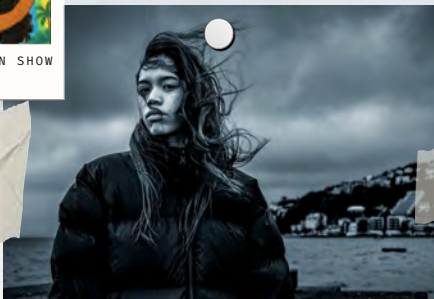
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THE LAST WORD

*Stacey Leilua on the magic of long-term creative collaborations.
Let's call it sweet repetition.*

In 2002, on my way to an audition, I received a ticket for three driving offences. Yes, at the same time. I know... Bad.

1. Excessive speed. Probably only by a few k's or so, but if you're over, you're over.
2. Driving on my restricted with an unlicensed passenger in the front seat (my friend who was also auditioning).
3. My WOF was expired (not a priority in your third year of drama school).

I can't remember the fine (Google tells me it would've been anywhere between \$400 and \$700), all I know is that it was certainly more than I could afford. That day, as I sheepishly drove away from the scene of the crime, I remember thinking, "I really hope something comes of this audition..."

Twenty-four years later, I'm happy to report that something absolutely *did* come from it. The other (more significant) reason that ticket was memorable is because of who I was rushing to audition for – Anapela Polata'ivao and Vela Manusaute. They had formed their company Kila Kokonut Krew around the same time, driven by a desire to forge their own path in an industry where

they felt neither seen nor heard. Eventually, I became one of the company directors of KKK, working alongside the two of them. The acronym was deliberately chosen to contribute to the wider conversation about narrative reclamation. Our collaborations – both during the company's life and since – include theatre, a web series, a radio arts show, musical theatre, a community TV skit show, an opera, devised community theatre and workshops, and, at the time of writing, multiple projects in development, including a feature film.

It is in this most recent film venture where I feel we have truly understood how to use our collective power. At the risk of sounding like the Planeteers, we each have our own strengths, and are united towards the shared goal that has always been in place from day one – increasing nuanced Pasifika representation, championing story sovereignty and creating opportunities for those who will come after us.

For this piece I was asked to explore the impact that repeating artistic relationships have on artists. When the cold reality of a career in the arts bites (and we all know it



can really bite), having your fellow creatives to lean on can feel like you have your own personal tiger-mink blanket to retreat into – whether it's for a coffee and faikakala session (my favourite mental health boost), to brainstorm a creative idea, or to discuss a new funding opportunity – hopefully sparking the next project. In an industry that can be isolating at times, extremely competitive, often racist and well, just... all round *hard*, I'm reminded of the advantages I've gained from years of being part of something bigger.

It's only now that I can truly appreciate Kila Kokonut Krew and the relationships we built at the time for what they really were. The proof is that while the company no longer exists, we still do, and we continue to work closely together. Back then, we were focused on having fun and stretching our creative muscles. We bridged the gap between what was in our bones as Pasifika creatives, and what we wanted to see

WE EACH HAVE OUR OWN STRENGTHS

ABOVE: Stacey, Vela and Anapela's most recent collaboration, Auckland Theatre Company's production of *Sons of Vao*. Image: Andi Crown Photography.



more of on our stages and screens. We had qualifications from the best drama schools in the country, and here we were dreaming up skits in a Manurewa backyard and going viral on YouTube before going viral was a thing. We were finding a balance, carving out a new way of telling our stories. We didn't have money to fund our creative pursuits, but we had each other. We taught ourselves technical and production skills out of necessity. We made mistakes, laughed and learnt. It was all about innovation and the pursuit of excellence.

Today, as an (almost) senior arts practitioner working as an actor, writer, producer and dramaturg, that work ethic is woven into everything I do. It shapes how I operate alongside my team and how we collaborate within broader projects. When you've spent nearly half your life working with the same small group, you end up developing a shorthand that makes things run more smoothly and actually pushes everyone to do better each time.

Throughout drama school, I remember being told one of the keys to having longevity in the performing arts meant identifying your 'why' – your motivation, your purpose. It's only

CARVING OUT A NEW WAY OF TELLING OUR STORIES

recently that I understand and appreciate the importance of also finding your 'who'. Call it a village (not fond of that one personally), your tribe (also not a fan, can you guess why lol), I think we call it – unofficially, and somewhat obviously, I guess – our TEAM.

Find those people. Your team. The ones who share your creative vision for the future. The ones that challenge you and keep you accountable, who make you laugh till you cry, who love you.

I'm glad I found mine.

ABOVE: Vela Manusaute, Anapela Polata'ivao and Stacey Leilua.

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*“Theatre contributes enlightenment.
It contributes coherence. It lays
a kind of grid on the disorder of the
world. It makes sense. And it also
makes beauty.”* – Bruce Mason, CBE

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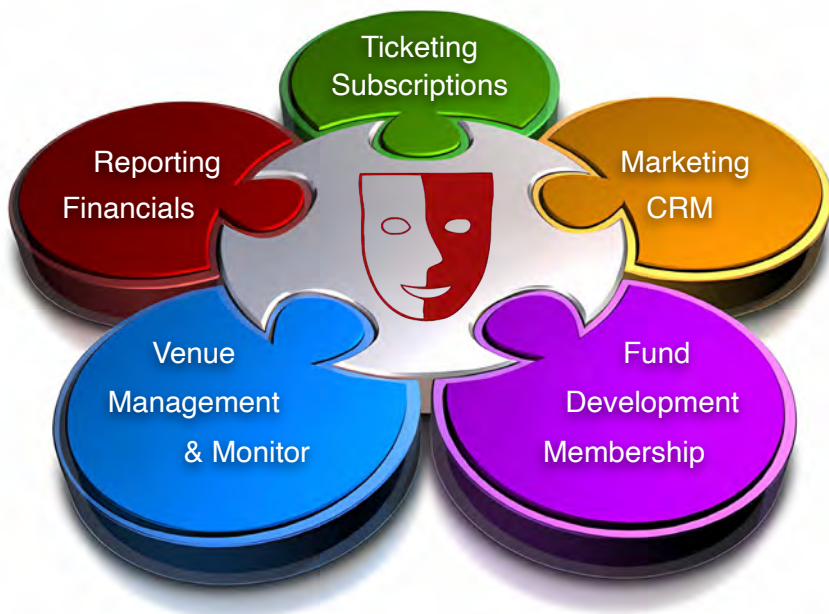
Image: Bruce Mason Centre



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