

# Kōtātara

The Newsletter of *Ōrotokare: Art, Story, Motion*

*Toward indigenous theatre and performing arts*

No. 5, October 2006

Tēnā koutou katoa.

In this edition of *Kōtātara* we report on the third and final of our 2006 series of haka/dance innovation workshops which took place at Pātaka Museum, Porirua, September 30 and October 1, 2006. Once again we were lead by Ngāi Tahu choreographer and dancer, Louise Pōtiki-Bryant and the workshop was attended by dancers and performers including Matariki Whatarau, Kura Te Ua and Toni Huata.

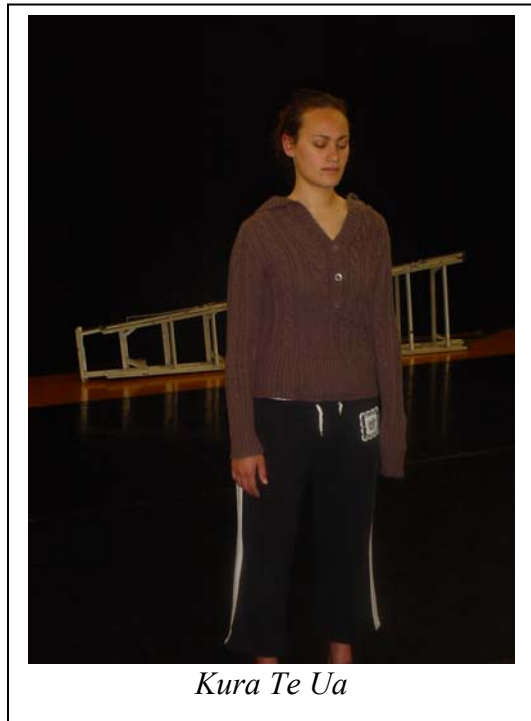
Just prior to the workshop, we learnt that our application to the Te Rea Māori performance innovation Wānanga was successful and so we used this workshop to explore ideas in preparation for the Te Rea Wānanga, which will take place in December.

In this workshop, we were able to continue and build upon some previous work as well as explore, in more detail, a series of new sequences.

## Finding form

There were two significant groups of sequences we explored during this weekend. The first concerned what can be termed 'te takenga o te ao', or 'the origin of the world'. Here various chants were employed to invoke the states of Āio and Te Pō. These sequences relate the emergence of light from darkness and form from nothingness. The first sequence was based upon a mantra chant using the word 'āio' (meaning peace, tranquillity). Here dancers were draped in darkness and the chant was allowed to evolve and move with great subtlety.

Overall, this part of movement is perhaps 'pre-movement' and 'pre-language'. One way of thinking about this 'space' is by considering the difference between articulated words and sentences and the vocalising of sounds, particularly vowel sounds. The music of this space is 'pre-form' returning instead to 'sound blocks' before conscious articulation.



Similarly for dance, the dance has yet to come to form. It is still pre-expression and so the movement took the form of small suggestions, subtle signals here and there suggesting that full movement had yet to arrive.

### **Light from Dark**

A second set of sequences concerned the emergence of light from darkness. The significance of this emergence for haka is that light is the basis of both the Hineruhi and Tānerore dances. As Tānerore is light on a hot day and Hineruhi is dawnlight, the emergence of light from darkness is of significance to their dances. Once again the movement here



*Louise Pōtiki-Bryant, Toni Huata, Kura Te Ua*

was at first 'pre-movement', internal to the body and subtle. We spent a good deal of time thinking about how darkness (and movement in darkness) could be presented on stage in which the light dances of Hineruhi and Tānerore might emerge. One key aspect of our thinking about darkness was the idea the *Te Pō* (night, dark) should be presented as a warm, loving world of potential rather than a fearful darkness. We thought about Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as an example of the delightful night, the night of young lovers. Because the deity of the traditional whare tapere was Rongo (deity of peace), the darkness of the whare tapere therefore should be a peaceful one.

### **A Note concerning 'Creation Traditions'**

As one may note from these ideas, the study of creation traditions is vital to understanding much of the literature of the traditional whare tapere. A key understanding is that 'creation traditions' do not relate to the historical creation of the world but rather are metaphorical of processes and cycles we see everyday. Creation stories, *pūrākau*, are symbolic of daily events and subsequently, we can see that Tānerore and Hineruhi are not historical figures, characters who lived their lives in times gone by but rather these are words for things we see and experience in an ongoing way. Hineruhi is dawnlight, something we see each day. Tānerore is light on a very hot day. The impact of seeing these traditions in this way is to encourage us to go out into the world and find models for our dance.

A second key idea about these traditions is that they are metaphorical of aspects of existence. Whilst they relate to actual things in our experiences, such as dawnlight, they are mythopoetic *stories* about these things. They are more akin to poetry than history. As such they guide us toward a passionate engagement with the natural world. The stories name elements of the natural world. They give them personalities and offer dramas and plots for them to follow. Hence, in exploring Hineruhi and Tānerore we are focusing upon two aspects of the behaviour of light and giving them names, personalities and dramas.

### **Te Rea Wānanga**

We are delighted to announce that our recent application to Te Ope-o-Rehua, Toi Māori Aotearoa to participate in the 'Te Rea Māori dance innovation Wānanga' was successful. We will be using the workshop to develop the first draft of new work that makes use of the ideas developed during our previous three workshops. So, watch this space!



### **Acknowledgements**

As this was the last of our workshops for 2006, we would like to send a mihi and acknowledgement to all those who supported us this year. They included Matariki Whatarau, Francine Sweetman, Bert van Dijk, Derek Renata, Dene Ainsworth, Marama Emery, Toni Huata, Terri Crawford, and Kura Te Ua. A big thank you to Louise Pōtiki-Bryant for guiding us through each of the workshops. We would also like to thank Mana Community Grants Foundation and to Porirua City Council and Whitireia Performing Arts (Gaylene Sciascia) for allowing us to use the Pātaka dance studios.



***Orotokare: Art, Story, Motion*** is a charitable trust dedicated to indigenous theatre and performing arts. *Orotokare* explores the traditional *whare tapere* (pā based houses of entertainment, storytelling and dance) and uses this as an inspiration and a starting point for a new indigenous theatre. The ethos of the trust is to be experimental, exploratory and *avant garde* seeking to find new ways of performing, new expressions of traditional ideas and innovative solutions to performance issues.

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*...korimako pae ki te **kōtātara**...  
'The bellbird alights upon its perch.'*

*Taken from a traditional Ngā Puhi chant used to welcome visitors to the marae.  
Its usage here is to suggest that this newsletter is like a perch upon which various  
birds are able to alight and address their audiences.*

*The bird – particularly the kākā, kuaka, kōtuku, huia, toroa and so on –  
is a traditional reference used in literature for the orator.*

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