

# Kōtātara

## The Newsletter of Ōrotokare: Art, Story, Motion Trust

*Toward indigenous theatre and performing arts*

No. 9, October 2008

Tēnā koutou katoa

In this edition of *Kōtātara* we report on our latest workshop recently held at Unitec in Auckland. This workshop is the first of a number to be convened before June 30, 2009, under the auspices of a new contract Ōrotokare has signed with Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga: National Institute of Research Excellence for Māori Development and Advancement (a centre of research excellence based at the University of Auckland).



*Ngāpaki Emery, Charles Royal, Ojeya Cruz Banks, Dolina Wehipeihana, Jack Gray Rachel Ruckstuhl-Mann, Louise Pōtiki-Bryant*

### **Our Contract with Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga**

We are delighted to announce that Ōrotokare was successful in securing a research contract from Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga. This will enable us to continue to engage choreographer Louise Pōtiki-Bryant. It will also enable us to secure the services of artist and sculptor Dr Brett Graham who will work on set design for the new *whare tapere*. A brief description of our project is as follows:

Whare tapere were pā based 'houses' of story telling, song, dance, games and more. Since 2005 Charles Royal has been collaborating with Louise Pōtiki-Bryant and Brett Graham on a new work entitled *Te Kārohirohi: The Light Dances* which makes use of traditional ideas about haka-dance which are not expressed in haka today. The proposed research will study creative processes by which ideas found in mātauranga Māori can be utilised in modern art works. Importantly, the goal of the project is not to involve traditional Māori performing arts in existing modern theatre, but rather to re-establish an institution called the *whare tapere*.

The project will study ways in which new artworks are created, artworks which involve the use of mātauranga Māori. Charles will act as lead researcher and will study ways in which both Louise and Brett make use of ideas and perspectives found within mātauranga Māori too influence their artmaking. Each part of the project is described as follows:

### ***Whakaahua: An Approach to Performing***

Louise Pōtiki-Bryant will convene a number of workshops on our behalf exploring key ideas including *whakaahua* which is described as follows:

*Mimesis* is a key feature of western theatre. In this approach, it is said that an actor dons the mask of a character and for a time acts out that character. In keeping with 'whare' located performance, we have been exploring the idea of *whakaahua* or 'coming to form'. Carvings in a whare whakairo are said to be ancestors 'coming to form'. In the whare tapere, excellent performance is achieved when an audience believes that a performer has been transformed in some way. Usually this means that a performer has become an *atua*, or a divine presence. This is reflected in the following expression used for a woman who has achieved excellence in dance: 'Ko Hineruhi koe, nāna i tū te ata hāpara.' (You are Hineruhi, the one who brings about the dawn). According to this expression the performer is not merely like Hineruhi but is Hineruhi *herself* manifest in the performer. This process of manifestation is what is referred to in the term *whakaahua*. In the traditional Māori worldview, the expression of mana in the world is of central importance. *Whakaahua* in performance is a process of expressing mana through performing. The purpose of this part of the research is to understand how mātauranga Māori can be used to inform a philosophy and practice of performance, thus making a contribution to mātauranga Māori itself.

*Ōrotokare* is dedicated to searching for a new way or approach to performance, based upon or inspired by some aspect of mātauranga Māori, which can inform the creation and presentation of new artworks. The recent Unitec workshop was the first of a series convened to explore these themes.

### ***Te Ao Mārama: Creating the Performance Space***

Dr Brett Graham will be engaged to experiment with performance spaces. A description of his part of the project is as follows:

Whare represent Te Ao Mārama, the world. The roof is Ranginui, the floor Papatuanuku, the poutokomanawa are Tāne who separates earth and sky. (The purpose of the pōwhiri is to bring people from Te Pō, represented by the marae ātea, into Te Ao Mārama, represented by the whare.) The goal of this case study is to understand the use of this mātauranga Māori in the creation of physical performance spaces. As the overall goal of the project is to assist the creation of the new



*Dr Brett Graham of  
Ngāti Korokī-Kahukura*

whare tapere (rather than the use of traditional performing arts in modern theatre), attention needs to be paid to the physical spaces in which these performances take place. A proposal is presented within Charles's doctoral dissertation (see [www.charles-royal.com](http://www.charles-royal.com)) for the construction of an outdoor theatre space in which the roof can be moved up and down, to represent the separation of Ranginui and Papatuanuku. The purpose of this part of the research is to understand how mātauranga Māori can be used in the construction of physical spaces, thus making a contribution to mātauranga Māori itself.

Brett Graham is one of New Zealand's most accomplished sculptors with an impressive exhibition history including selection for the collateral events of the 2007 Venice Art Biennale. His work has been included in major national and international exhibitions including 'Pūrangiāho Seeing Clearly' at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki; 'Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance', City Gallery Wellington; 'Prospect 2001', City Gallery Wellington and the Asia Pacific Triennial at the Queensland Art Gallery 1996. His work is also featured in most major collections in the country, and his portfolio includes many major public commissions, including 'Kahukura' for the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, New Caledonia, 'Kaiwhakaterere' in a site beside Parliament Buildings, Wellington, 'Kōwhatu Kārohirohi' for the Victoria University Collection, and 'Escape' for the North Shore Court House. We delighted to be able to collaborate with this important Māori artist.

### **Our Latest Workshop: Unitec Auckland, 9-12 October 2008**

Our latest workshop was recently convened at Unitec in Auckland and was again led by Louise Pōtiki-Bryant and Charles Royal. The purpose of the workshop (and all the workshops to be convened under our contract with Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga) was to begin an exploration of an approach to performing which we have named *whakaahua*. In a previous edition of *Kōtātara* No. 7 July 2007), we described *whakaahua* as follows:

In theatre traditions throughout the world, one can find a variety of approaches to performing. Perhaps the most well know is the use of *mimesis* in western theatre. In this approach, it is said that an actor dons the mask of a character and for a time acts out that character. Whilst this is not the only kind of approach in western theatre, this is a key aspect of it. As an approach to performing, *Ōrotokare* has been exploring the concept of *whakaahua*, which literally means 'coming to form'. In traditional Māori performance, it appears that excellent performance is achieved when an audience believes that a performer has been transformed in some way. That is, a performer is not merely like or akin to something but has actually been transformed themselves. Usually this means that a performer has become an *atua*, or a divine presence. We see this idea reflected in the following expression used for a woman who has achieved excellence in dance: 'Ko Hineruhi koe, nāna i tū te ata hāpara.' (You are Hineruhi, the one who brings about the dawn). We note in this expression that the

performer is not merely like Hineruhi but is Hineruhi herself manifest in the performer. This process of manifestation is what is referred to in the term *whakaahua*. In the traditional Māori worldview, the expression of mana in the world is of central importance. *Whakaahua* in performance is a process of expressing mana through performing. It entails asking of performers to undertake a deep process, seeking resources within and bringing them outward in a performance.

Specifically, the workshop explored and experimented with *whakaahua* in three key areas:

- *Ōrotokare* core values and principles of performing
- *Whare Tapere* fragments
- *Te Kārohirohi: The Light Dances* a new work by Louise Pōtiki-Bryant and Charles Royal

#### *Core Values and Principles of Performing*

We began our workshop by discussing *Ōrotokare* core values and principles for performing. Our aspiration is that no matter what work *Ōrotokare* is presenting, these core values and principles will still be expressed in the work. Core values include:

- Love
- Joy
- Compassion
- Aroha
- Manaakitanga

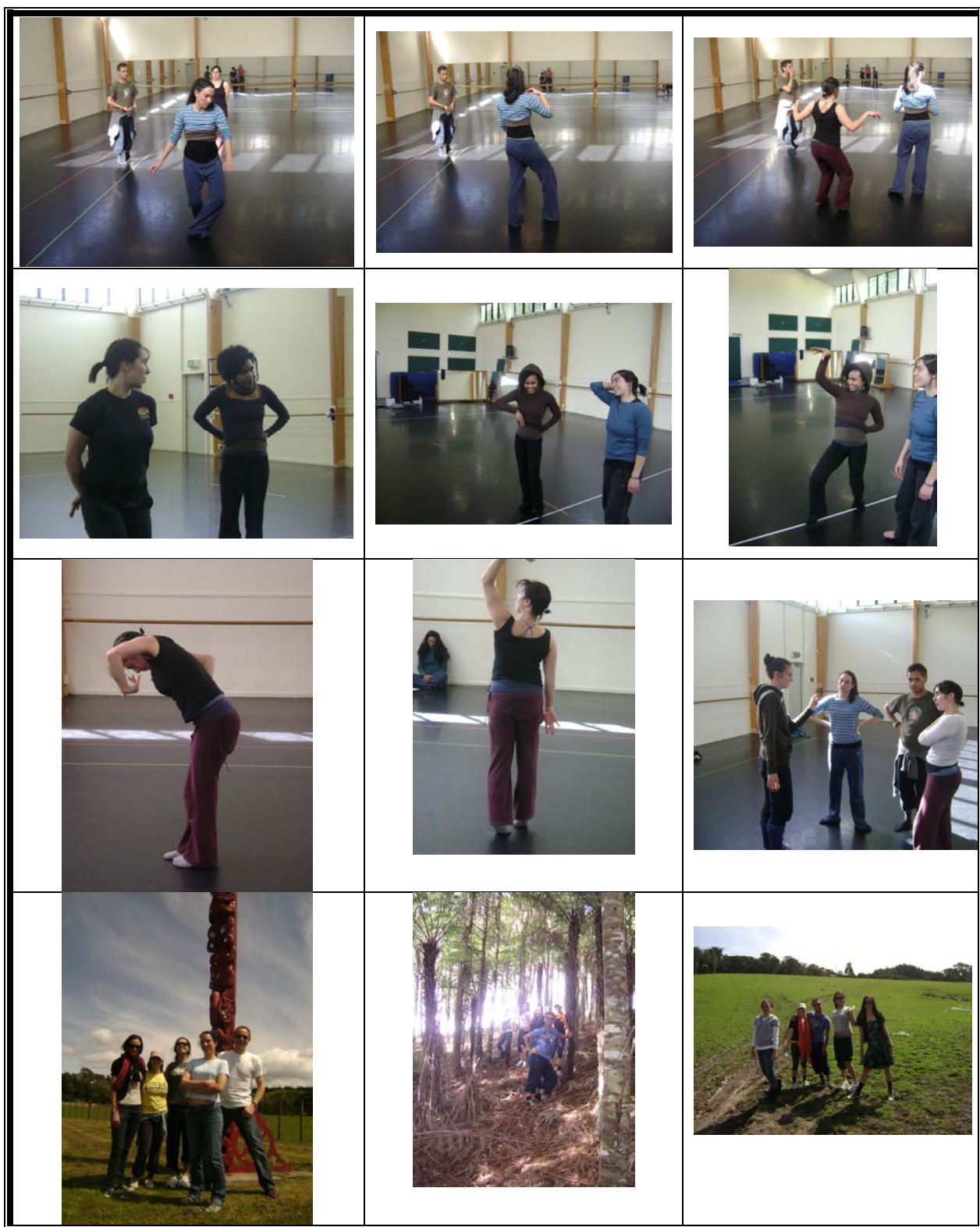
Some principles of our performing include:

- Commencing with stillness and wholeness before action comes forth
- The integrity of the backbone
- *Whakaahua*

With respect to *whakaahua*, an example of this is the experimentation with birds. During day two, we explored bird dance both in unison and individually. Our dancers enacted various bird life movements accompanied by a chant on the name 'Ōrotokare'. Dancers slowly made their way into the performing space, claiming the space as their own and transformed themselves.

#### *Whare Tapere Fragments*

A second set of ideas arise from the various fragments about dance that can be discovered in existing knowledge concerning the traditional *whare tapere*. Here we explore, for example, the dances of Hineruhi and Tānerore, the dances recorded in the story concerning Tinirau and Kae, various aspects of dance such as illusion, individual versus collective dance and more.



## **Key Ideas for our Report to Ngā Pae**

As we will be completing a report later in our project for the perusal of Ngā Pae, it is helpful to begin thinking about potential contents of that report. Whilst the report will contain information about the workshops and the development of *Te Kārohirohi*, it is helpful to also consider the larger research/academic issues that attend to this project. These include:

### *Artistic Practice and Research*

There is a significant issue concerning the relationship between artistic process (the creation of artistic knowledge) and research, that is, whether artistic process can be properly considered as research. There is considerable debate about this question and artists are in no doubt that artistic process is about the creation of new knowledge (the purpose of research). However, the processes and outcomes developed through art making are quite different to that found in the sciences and humanities. Art making embraces the intuitive and non-rational aspects of our thinking and being. Similarly, the outcomes of artistic process are art pieces – a new dance, a piece of music or poetry and so on. These are significantly different to that found in scientific research but nonetheless represent the creation of new knowledge. We will introduce this topic for discussion in our report and often some comment on it.

### *Mātauranga Māori and Performing Arts*

A second and significant issue relates to the 'creative potential' of mātauranga Māori in the field of performing arts. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the use of mātauranga Māori derived created forms in a wide variety of performing arts – such as moko, taonga pūoro, haka and more. This project makes use of research into the traditional whare tapere. Although fragmentary, information about this pre-contact institution contains ideas and perspectives that one may uplift in our artmaking today. The work of *Ōrotokare* is to identify these ideas and fragments and make use of them in new performances. Our report will contain a discussion and some reflections on this aspect of our research.



**Ōrotokare: Art, Story, Motion Trust** is a charitable trust dedicated to indigenous theatre and performing arts. *Ōrotokare* 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.

### **Make a Donation, Express Your Support!**

As a charitable trust, *Ōrotokare: Art, Story, Motion Trust* relies on donations, sponsorships and other kinds of philanthropic support. If you would like to support our organisation and make a donation, please let us know by writing to:

Dr Charles Royal  
 Artistic Director  
*Ōrotokare: Art, Story, Motion Trust*  
 PO Box 54142, Mana, Porirua 5247  
 Email: [ahukaramu@gmail.com](mailto:ahukaramu@gmail.com)  
 Website: [www.orotokare.org.nz](http://www.orotokare.org.nz)

Donations can be made directly into our bank account below and if you would like a receipt, please let us know.

Bank Account: 03-0547-0674973-00  
 Westpac, Porirua City

*Ōrotokare: Art, Story, Motion* was established on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2004. It is a charitable trust and meets exemption requirements under CB4 of the Income Tax Act 1994. IRD/Exemption No. 88-660-536. *Ōrotokare: Art, Story, Motion* is supported by:



*...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.*

*Kōtātara is published quarterly (or when resources allow) by Ōrotokare: Art,  
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