

## PACIFIC VOICES – REPORT

### Introduction

Building on the success of Purakau Pounamu which toured the UK in 2003 and the enthusiasm which that engendered, Rangimoana and I decided to mount a tour which offered the addition of Samoan Storyteller and poet, Rosanna Raymond. Rangimoana also wished to present the work of living Maori writers, in particular Patricia Grace and Apirana Taylor. We offered two programmes, one of traditional stories and one “Ancient & Modern” which combined Rosanna’s stunning poetry with the contemporary Maori work. There was particular enthusiasm from the Rural Touring network, who pencilled in bookings very quickly. We also had the possibility to return to “Storytelling Café” in the Midlands with the traditional programme.



Rosanna & Rangimoana open the show. Tawhaki – an old woman spins a thread

Our application to Arts Council England (grants for the arts) was unfortunately unsuccessful, the reasons being: Too little funds available, the suggestion that “Live Literature” was sufficiently funded already and that many of the rural touring schemes are ACE supported. This application unfortunately coincided with the treasury announcement of standstill funding for the arts.

Our board was consulted and a decision made to increase the price of the shows and reduce the company wages accordingly. Fortunately Creative New Zealand were undeterred and funded Rangimoana’s air fare and village promoters were able to provide hospitality in many instances enabling the tour to proceed even though we lost a number of bookings.

### The Tour

A four day rehearsal period developed the new work, incorporated the two performers into a partnership, working on the introduction and farewell.

Venues Played

Buckinghamshire for “Theatre in the Villages” –The Lee Parish Hall and The Bernard Hall, Cuddington.

Cambridge : Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology

Devon: Stockland School at the Village Hall

Dorset for “Artsreach” – the Pamela Hambro Hall, Winterborne Stickland; Bradford Peverell Villabe Hall and Fontmell Magna Village Hall.

Gloucestershire: Ruskin Mill, Nailsworth.

Isle of Wight for the Storytelling Festival – the Wilberforce Hall, Brighstone and workshops at Sandown Library and Chale primary School.

Lancashire: Word Of Mouth in Manchester. For “Spot On” Walley Village Hall

London : Oh Art! at Oxford House, The Bayswater Families Centre.

Norwich : The Vauxhall Centre (Signed performance)

Nottinghamshire: Palace Theatre, Mansfield

Oxfordshire: for “Arts at Large” Shutford Village Hall

Somerset : Sidcot School and Castle School. For “Take Art Live” – Monksilver, North Cadbury and Ashbrittle Village Halls.

For the two middle weeks Rangimoana presented Pacific Voices as a solo show and this included Bunesan School on the Island of Mull and Westquarter Primary School, Falkirk.

In all there were: 15 two hander performances, 9 Solo performances by Rangimoana.

Workshops: Rangimoana lead 3 adult storytelling workshops at Sandown Library (Isle of Wight), Cambridge University and New Zealand House benefiting a total of 26 participants. Rosanna lead 1 school workshop at Chale Primary School ( Isle of Wight) where the entire school of 19 pupils participated. We were also invited to help open a specially carved storytelling seat at Brighstone Primary School ( Isle of Wight)



Jim Dunn - signed performance at Norwich. Rosanna with children from Chale Primary School

## The Stories

### Rosanna

*The Clam and Her Daughter*- a story of unconditional love. Doomed to remain a clam until she is released by her beautiful daughter, Vasua is loved by the King of Tonga. 14 performances



Preparing to meet the King of Tonga

*Tatau* - How the tradition of body tattooing came to Samoa from Fiji. Rosanna prefaces this story with an account of her own Tatau and her personal journey. 14 performances

*Sina and the Eel* – A love story about Sina, the legendary Woman of the Pacific and her relationship with the God of the eels, “Tuna” resulting in the arrival of the coconut in the Islands of Polynesia. 4 performances

*Warm Breezes and Soft Touches* -poetry written and performed by Rosanna - spoken words are infused with traditional instruments and oral histories from Polynesia to reflect modern pacific landscape and culture.



Warm Breezes Assembly at Chale

Maori Stories of Aotearoa: **Rangimoana**

*The Return of Maui* (retold silently with movement) Maui, the ‘Maori demigod’ is thought to have been still-born. He is taken to the Sky Father and learns the ways of the Gods. He returns to Earth to meet his family and performs many great feats. 5 performances

*Maui and the Gift of Fire* (retold silently with movement) Fire has been in use for a long time but they must never be extinguished. Maui wants to know why. He extinguishes all fire and travels to the under-world to look for it’s origins. 4 performances

*Rata and Tree* - Rata decides to build a great war canoe. He finds the best tree in the forest and after felling it, falls asleep. When he wakes up the next morning he is surprised at what he finds. A story with an ecological message. 5 performances

*The Ugly-man* - How come Tama, an ugly man, had such a beautiful wife? What happens when she is abducted and spells cast to prevent Tama recovering her? Who will help Tama? A story of great courage and perseverance. 7 performances

*Tawhaki* - Tawhaki is not only drop dead gorgeous but he seems to be an expert in everything from hunting to singing. He marries a Princess from the heavens and then the problems start. An epic quest to find inner strength. 13 performances

*The Most Beautiful Woman* - Seven brothers hear about a woman called Roronga and set off to find her. When they return each thinks they have married her, the most beautiful woman in the world. How did this happen? 7 Performances

*The Stars* Tane uses grains of sand to cover his Father the sky at night. 3 performances.

*Creation* The children of the Sky Father and Earth Mother decide to separate their parents. 2 performances. (1 combined with *Matariki*)

*Rona* Unlike other Mythologies, Maori legends talk of a woman who lives in the moon. This is a short story of how she got there. 1 performance.

*Pou* by Apirana Taylor. Pou is a carving buried by an earthquake many years ago. Another earthquake releases him from his imprisonment but he does not recognise his surroundings in modern Aotearoa ( New Zealand) until he meets a carving of his creator, who explains it all. 14 performances

*It Used to be Green Once* by Patricia Grace. Mum embarrasses the kids with old clothes and an old car but one day they win the lottery and can afford food, new clothes and a new car. Mum doesn't change though and the new car gradually becomes, old and faded. 15 performances

## **The audiences :**

A total of 1,600 saw Pacific Voices with an overall turnout of 68%.

Audience feedback was generally extremely positive and enthusiastic praising the high standard of the performances and presentation.

## Comments

All round enjoyable performance. Multi-lingual performance helped carry the audience down to New Zealand and into the stories. Explanation of the Maori culture provided education alongside entertainment. Thank you for coming to North Cadbury Village Hall

We were transported to the south Pacific. The show held the children (who represented 23 nations) and the stories will live with them. (Sidcot school)

A wonderfully captivating show. The children were wide eyed with wonder and totally engrossed. A fabulous opportunity to learn about another culture. (Stockland)

It's crucial in our demographic area to bring events such as this to our venue.

The quality of the artistic was at a high level and what we expected. The repertoire was the correct mix of historical and modern. It was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Louise Wildish – Mansfield Palace Theatre

Stunning. What can I say? So much more than mere entertainment! I was so moved, so enthralled. I learnt a lot and could listen forever. Thank you, thank you thank you. Best fiver ever spent. ( Norwich)

Very unusual and lovely to hear such an enthusiastic storyteller from a different culture (Shutford)

Feels good to get diverse culture outside the big metropolis (Shutford)

Amazing and powerful – please come back – ( Manchester)

## **Audience questionnaire**

97 responses were collected from adult and family shows.

Respondents were asked how they found out about the show.

52 % - word of mouth, 26% saw a leaflet, 20% saw an article in a local paper and 18% saw a season brochure.

54% had attended this kind of event, while an encouraging 38% were new audiences.

When asked what most persuaded the audience to attend the top score was an interest in the performers, second was to support the venue and third was because they lived locally. Three categories came equal in respondents' second choice: An interest in the performers, finding the leaflet interesting and living locally.

Clearly, as indicated by comments, people like to have entertainment available locally are willing to support their local village halls and enjoy diverse culture.

Questions about the venues vary but 78% found the quality of performance and material excellent and the remainder found this good.

72 % also found the show excellent value for money.

Other cultural activities attended in the last 2 years:

Art Gallery/Museum 78%; Play/Drama 74%; Film or Art house 69%; Rock or pop concert 53%; Jazz or world music 49%; Dance 41%; Musical 38%; Classical Music 33%; Nightclub 32%; Stand up Comedy 27%,

### **Ethnic Backgrounds**

White British 70% White Irish 2% White other 17% (includes a 14 year old Jedi Knight) Mixed white and Black Caribbean 2% Mixed other 8%, Other minority 5%

### **Age range**

Under 16 7%, 16-19 6%, 20-24 4%, 25-34 15%, 35-44 16%, 45-54 25%, 55-64 16%, 65 and over 9%.

Disability: 2% identified as deaf, 1% with other disability.

## **From Rosanna Raymond**

I would like to thank Christopher for producing the Pacific Voices tour it was an amazing experience for me on many levels, personal and professional and I was proud to be able to share aspects of my cultural heritage and help give the Pacific and New Zealand a visual presence here in the UK.

Thanks to excellent organisation in front and behind stage I never had to worry about anything other than concentrating on the performance, which not only helped the overall quality of my performance but also enhanced my overall enjoyment of the tour.

I really felt myself grow as a performer thanks to Christopher and Rangimoana's guidance and generosity with their collective knowledge and understanding of theatre and acting that they shared with me and I left the tour with many new skills that will carry into my work in the future.

## **From Rangimoana Taylor**

Christopher Preston's organisation skills, knowledge of touring companies and a history of working with people of many cultural backgrounds in the UK, enabled me to concentrate solely on the performance and teaching work. A highlight for me was having the opportunity of working with Rosanna Raymond, a New Zealand born Samoan writer, performance and visual artist who has been living in the UK for around six years. Rosanna's talent and skills made this a very enjoyable tour as she told stories from the wider Pacific as well as performing her own poetry. Rosanna is to be an artist in residence 2006 at Cambridge University.

I enjoyed the performance work which was mainly to adults, although it was good to do a few shows for children. The highlights for me were performing on the Isle of Mull in Scotland, performing for refugee families in London and the teaching at Cambridge University, Isle of White, and with the Maori kapa haka groups in London.

## **Creative producer's summary**

I was particularly pleased with the way the two hander show worked in performance and the time spent rehearsing with Rangimoana and Rosanna was well spent. Timings of the show were consequently accurate and the structure pleased the audiences. The combination of ancient stories and modern literature gave a good contrast and there were clear links between them. The story of Pou neatly brought the modern into conflict with the past and Rosanna's story of how she came to have Tatau had echoes in her poetry.

Artistically the tour was a great success as indicated by the questionnaire. It was a pity therefore that there weren't more bookings. This was partly due to the increased price as several villages and promoters were not able to afford to book so many shows as they had to subsidise ticket prices. One rural touring promoter commented that had the Arts Council funded the project. Even more rural people might have benefited.

Clearly there is an interest in cultural diversity in regional and rural England which remains predominately White British in identity. In particular I would like to thank the rural touring promoters who booked the show and the villagers of England who were so hospitable, enthusiastic and warm.

It was very exciting to see how much Rangimoana's work had grown since the tour in 2003 and how it grew during this tour. His influence on Rosanna developed her stories and poetry to new heights. We were also able to arrange for him to hold a performance workshop for Ngati Ranana and Manaia members prior to their annual concert. Thanks to New Zealand House for providing the space to do this.

Christopher Preston February 2006

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