

# KOWHITI 2015



***EDITED BY PETER CLEAVE***

## *Dedication*

This Collection is dedicated to Creative New Zealand, the Embassy of the United States Of America, Tiahuia and Neil Gray, the Wellington City Council, the Australian High Commission and Whitireia New Zealand for the marvellous support given to *Kowhiti Atarau 2013*.

Peter Cleave  
Editor

# Contents

	<b>Foreword</b>	iv
	PETER CLEAVE	
	<b>Introduction</b>	v
1	<b>Dancing Earth</b>	1
	RULAN TANGEN	
2	<b>Atamira Dance Company and Indigenous Performance: The Making of Māori Worlds</b>	37
	OJEYA CRUZ BANKS	
3	<b>Stephen A'Court interviewed by Peter Cleave</b>	59
	STEPHEN A'COURT	
4	<b>Indigenous Dance and the Nation: Conflation and Metonymy</b>	73
	DECLAN PATRICK	
5	<b>A Case for Creative Misunderstanding</b>	87
	SHARON MAZER	
6	<b>But can it be Art? Kapa Haka as a contemporary indigenous performance practice</b>	105
	SHARON MAZER & TE RITA PAPESCH	
7	<b>Postscript: Starter questions for a Postscript posed by Peter Cleave and answered by Merenia Gray, Jenny Stevenson and Tanemahuta Gray</b>	119
	MERENIA GRAY, JENNY STEVENSON, AND TANEMAHUTA GRAY	
8	<b>Illuminating Cultural Terrains in Dance: A Symbiotic Approach to Analysis and Interpretation</b>	128
	DR LINDA ASHLEY	
9	<b>Te Reinga</b>	157
	JACK GRAY	

## Foreword

Tena koutou.

This collection follows *Koowhiti, a Special Collection* in tekaharoa.com and Go Press. The collection shows the benefits of having an academic dimension to a dance conference. The extensiveness of the conference itself where dancers and academics mingled and shared thoughts made it original in the New Zealand context and significant in the world context.

This collection celebrates the performer and then gives space to academic commentary. In the perspectives offered there is also a sense of a new or, at the least, a refreshing dance commentary.

The layout has been done again by Paul Moon and the team at tekaharoa.com and the photographs have been arranged by Merenia and Tanemahuta Gray, Jenny Stevenson and Stephen A'Court.

My thanks to all involved,

Peter Cleave

Editor

April 2015

## Introduction

*What did the critics say?*

What did the critics say about Kowhiti Atarau 2013? There were several reviews of performances and the papers that follow give an indication of the academic stream. The Postscript at the end of this collection by the Principals in Kowhiti, Merenia and Tanemahuta Gray and Jenny Stevenson augment the reviews.

Firstly though, to go over the basic information about Kowhiti Atarau, the third season of Kowhiti, it took place in Wellington in November 2013 at the Wellington Opera House, Te Papa Tongarewa and Whitireia Performance Arts Centre. As one critic, Linda Ashley, says;

*This third season curated by Kowhiti (Merenia and Tanemahuta Gray, and Jenny Stevenson) celebrates the international phenomenon of indigenous contemporary dance. Although possibly not intentional, the programme has an elemental feel befitting indigenous peoples' concerns about earth, air, fire and water. These threads interlace throughout the programme, reminiscent of the Maori art of weaving.*

*Ashley 2013*

Performers and academics from all over the world attended. This included people not often seen here;

*For the first time in living memory, a visit to Aotearoa (New Zealand) by a Native American contemporary dance company - in this case, Santa Fe based Dancing Earth - reciprocated an important cultural exchange between Maori and our indigenous cousins.*



Photo: Stephen A'Court  
Pictured: Rulan Tangen, Dancing Earth

*Irrepressible dreamer and visionary, Rulan Tangen - the company's tireless Artistic Director - drew 12 years of research collecting intertribal stories of the Indigenous Grandmothers in a prophetic dance theatre retelling through traditional dance movement, symbolic patterns reflecting ancient motifs, and dreamscapes that gave mystic and horrifying real scenarios exploring the consequences of human activity surrounding the pollution and greed in mismanagement of tribal waterways. The consequences are potentially devastating.*

*Jack Gray 2013*



Photo: Stephen A'Court  
Pictured: Dancing Earth Company

There was group work;

*Rulan Tangen and her dancers of Dancing Earth open the show with an eco-production *Walking at the Edge of Water*. They first appear in the foyer, slowly ghosting amongst the buzz of the audience – otherworldly. As is Tangen's policy, local indigenous artists are included in their performances, and this inclusivity is to be applauded as a strategy that could contribute to building this dance community globally. Maori choreographer*

*and dancer, Jack Gray contributes to the ethnic mosaic of Western contemporary, several American First Nation tribes and Afro-American dancing.*

*Linda Ashley 2013*

and there was individual work;



Photo: Stephen A'Court

Pictured: Masepah Banu, Baiwa Dance Company



*The solo, Warupaw UJecheo of Drums, (Rita Pryce, Baiwa Dance), is danced with appealing simplicity by Masepah Banu. Exploring Torres Strait Islander peoples' connection to nature, there are entrancing moments in which, navigating by the stars, the dance drifts between islands across the stage. Banu, stooped over, dances syncopated steps, stamps, claps and calls recalling more ancient times. As ocean breezes blow the sails of the costume-prop, the past is connected to the present through the curve of the horizon. There is an older worldliness about the movement, and yet it carries contemporary relevance without calling on western contemporary dance. I would like to see more.*

*Linda Ashley 2013*

There were the usual suspects;

*In Flodiac, Future Fame did what he usually does and the audience adored him.*

*Ann Hunt 2013*



Photo: Stephen A'Court

Pictured: Future Fame

and there were departures;

*Tanemahuta Gray makes a radical departure from previous work to present Tiki Taane Mahuta. It is a rollicking and times highly entertaining ride propelled by strong and surprising*

*imagery created in response to two albums by Tiki Taane. The 5 pieces are excerpts from a planned longer work; however, as yet the narrative thread is obscure. There is a fantastic dance on a couch with Jana Castillo manipulated by hidden dancers; a perfect marriage of music and image. Gray has utilized the choreographic skills of the dancers; Luke Hanna, Castillo, Mark Bonnington, Sharn Te Pou, Andrew Miller, Anna Flaherty and Lauren Byrne, with dynamic aerial tactics to direct a work that with astute dramaturgy will have legs for the Festival circuit.*

*Lyne Pringle 2013*



Photo: Stephen A'Court

Pictured: Anita Hunziker and Luke Hanna, Aotearoa Aerial Theatre Company

Like most shows of this calibre there was a fitting finale as Lyne Pringle reports;

*Merena Gray presents her substantial work Rangimarie – Peace to conclude the programme; Footnote Dance Company are her refined collaborators, along with Luke Hanna and Tanemahuta Gray plus accomplished animation and sound designers. This sophisticated and aesthetically strong work is*

*broken into three sections beginning with a compelling solo by Emily Adams, a haunted and searching presence, articulating visceral grief as the wind blows through the whare at Mitimiti while rain falls and falls and the dancer strives for reconciliation with nature. This is the most successful choreographic output by Gray to date. A duet, Rongo Mā Tāne, between Luke Hanna on the ground and Tanemahuta Gray in the air, brings back the aerial component which leads to some distinctive, symmetrical choreography. The device becomes clumsy once the dancer hits the ground, despite the obvious complicité with Hanna. From there the work moves into more predictable territory in the third section, Whai Atu. It is interesting to see the [Pakeha] Footnote dancers embrace the traditional components of rakau and movement derived from kapa haka. Again the work has a choreographic surety which leads to a satisfying conclusion.*

*During the evening, a deeply moved Suzanne Renner was honoured with a Kowhiti Life-Time Achievement Award for her contribution to the development of dance in Aotearoa.*

*Lyne Pringle 2013*



Photo: Stephen A'Court

Pictured: Merenia Gray Dance Theatre Company

But the performance work was only part of the equation at Kowhiti Atarau and the rest of this volume shows some of the academic work presented. Other work has been presented elsewhere sometimes being altered with revision. The bulk of what follows is as delivered at Kowhiti Atarau with the possible exception of Linda Ashley's contribution which is a new essay.

Stephen A'Court's responses to questions are unusual in that dance photography is not often considered on a separate, stand alone basis but as the photographs in this collection show the photography was of a very high standard and Stephen's reflections on his work are important.

As mentioned earlier the Postscript by Jenny Stevenson, Tanemahuta Gray and Merenia Gray sums up the whole event, academic and performance.

## **Bibliography**

Ashley, Linda EXPLORE DANCE Website: <http://www.exploredance.com>. Eco-Warriors Dancing - Review of Kowhiti Dance 2013 - Atarau - A Beam of Light: Indigenous Contemporary Dance November 8, 2013 Wellington Opera House

Gray, Jack EXPLORE DANCE Website: <http://www.exploredance.com>. Dancing Earth in Aotearoa November 8, 2013 Wellington Opera House [www.dancingearth.org](http://www.dancingearth.org)

Hunt, Ann, The Dominion Post Kowhiti Dance 2013: Atarau - A Beam of Light: Indigenous Contemporary Dance Festival Opera House, Wellington, November 7

Pringle, Lyne KOWHITI ATARAU - BROADLY INDIGENOUS PERFORMANCES Dance Wellington 2013 Kowhiti 2013 Atarau Festival of Indigenous Contemporary Dance Directors: Tanemahuta Grey, Merenia Grey; Producer: Jenny Stevenson Choreographers: Rulan Tangen (Dancing Earth), Rita Price (Baiwa Dance Company), Merenia Gray, Tanemahuta Grey, Louise Potiki Bryant at Opera House, Wellington From 7 Nov 2013 to 8 Nov 2013 8 Nov 2013