

CHAPTER REPORTS



by **Tania Kopytko**,
execdirector@danz.org.nz

Aotearoa, New Zealand

Kia ora and warmest greetings to WDA Asia Pacific members from Dance Aotearoa New Zealand (DANZ). It is already June and New Zealand has experienced a huge array of dance activity.

The Te Matatini National Kapa Haka Festival, a major biennial Maori cultural milestone, was held in Palmerston North from 22 to 25 February with crowds of over 40,000 and thirty groups competing. Te Matatini is now recognised by UNESCO as an important world cultural event.

Kapa Haka is commonly used to describe modern day performance of traditional and contemporary Maori song and dance. The performance can be competitive or non-competitive and performed by any number of people. In Te Matatini competition is keen, with Kapa Haka groups across the country first competing against other teams in their own rohe or region to qualify for the National Festival.

This year for the first time Te Matatini introduced Hakarongomai, an interpretation facility via a special on-site radio broadcast which enabled visitors to tune into a live venue frequency for an English commentary on the stage performance. With this increased communication of the performance and its messages, Te Matatini is leading Maori culture in encouraging more Maori and Pakeha (non Maori New Zealanders) to develop a deeper understanding of the complex art forms.

The festival culminated in a magnificent performance event with excellent TV coverage, demonstrating to the nation the truly spectacular, rich and varied nature of Maori performance and culture. Krumping and hip hop were also supported in the youth arena and a new Kapa Haka performance program for elders was premiered which will help retain old performance traditions.

In the words of Te Matatini: 'Kapa Haka celebrates Maori contribution to New Zealand's uniqueness in this modern world. Kapa Haka removes the battlefields of Maori ancestors, with inherent competitiveness now taking place on stage. Kapa Haka recognises the strength of diversity among Maori tribes, iwi, hapu, whanau, while equally encouraging all of us to come together and celebrate as one'. For more information visit <www.tematatini.org.nz>

The Auckland Festival AK07 ran from 9 to 25 March and included new NZ dance work. A new-look Black Grace Dance Company presented *Amata* by choreographer and director Neil Leremia. *Dark Tourists* choreographed by Malia Johnston explored extinction and environmental issues. *Tempest*, created by Lemi Ponifasio for Mau dance/theatre group, explored



MAU Dance Company in *Tempest*
choreographed by Lemi Ponifasio
Photographer: Lemi Ponifasio

colonial conquest and the indigenous voice with great power and beauty. This new work will be premiered in Europe this year and will no doubt fascinate and thrill international audiences.

The enormous Pasifika Festival was also held in Auckland at the Western Springs park and stadium in March and was supported by a variety of smaller events in galleries and other venues across the city. Pasifika is the South Pacific's largest Pacific Island community event. It began in 1993 and attendance has grown from 30,000 to over 210,000 with four performance stages and hundreds of performers from all over Auckland, New Zealand and the Pacific. See <www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/whatson/events/pasifika/default.asp>

These are just some of the many dance events that are happening this year in New Zealand. They demonstrate the exciting cultural and artistic exploration that is happening in dance. Despite often fragile support we have artists who are daring and determined to express who they are through dance, music and song.

We are not just a sporting nation—dance is a strong part of our cultural and social fabric. More and more, people are choosing to use dance to maintain their culture and identity, express themselves, keep fit, have fun and socialise. For more information visit <www.danz.org.nz>

Dance, the heartbeat of our nation!