

IN CONVERSATION WITH SUE PATERSON



SUE PATERSON
PHOTO: DEIRDRE TARRANT

After eight years of leading the New Zealand Festival Sue Paterson will be stepping down as the Executive Director. In this article Sue talks to DANZ Chief Executive Anton Carter.

Sue is no stranger to the Festival having been the Marketing Director from 1994 to 1998 and since taking on the role of Executive Director in 2009, she has helped to lead a highly successful

biennial New Zealand Festival and annual Wellington Jazz Festival, delivering significant economic impacts to Wellington city. Economic analysts BERL have estimated the New Zealand Festival generated an economic impact in excess of \$100 million for the capital in early 2016*. Under Sue's leadership, the festival was awarded a 2014 Arts Access Award in acknowledgement of its inclusive accessibility policies and a 2015 Vibrant Gold Award for being a standout Wellington event.

As the outgoing Executive Director, how has the New Zealand Festival supported programming dance?

During my time at the New Zealand Festival (2009 to 2016), I have worked with two Artistic Directors – Lissa Twomey (2010 and 2012 Festivals) and Shelagh Magadza (2014 and 2016 Festivals). They both developed strong and memorable dance programmes. As a result, we have attracted a loyal and growing audience for dance.

What has been the Festival's commitment to programming New Zealand dance works?

Lissa and Shelagh have selected significant New Zealand dance works as follows:

2010 – *MTYLAND* (Clare O'Neil/Footnote Dance New Zealand) was a “search for calm amidst life's chaos”. Through the use of language, physicality, humour and sense of space, *MTYLAND* was a reaction to the impact of war and violence. An even more relevant work today than it was six years ago.

2012 – *Birds With Skymirrors* (Lemi Ponifasio/MAU). This profound, visual masterpiece was co-produced with a host of international presenters and “a timely reflection of our connection to the Earth and our incredible power to protect or destroy what surrounds us”.

2014 – *The Crimson House* (Lemi Ponifasio/MAU) was a world premiere co-produced with other international presenters. “We are players of hide and seek in the Garden of Eden, a world that sees all and never forgets,” is a description of a work that transcends conventional ideas of theatre and dance.

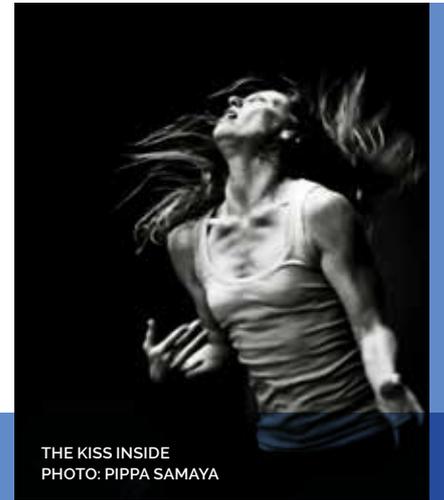
2014 – *Stones in Her Mouth* (Lemi Ponifasio/MAU) takes its title from a book of poems by Roma Potiki. It is a powerful work performed by a 10-member ensemble of Māori women through oratory, choral work and dance which “turns a mirror on the social and political turmoil of our times”.

2014 – *AGE* (Ross McCormack/Muscle Mouth). Exploring human curiosity and physical power through the interaction of three generations of performers, this was Ross's first full-length work with his company, Muscle Mouth.

2016 – *Le Grand Continental*[®] (Sylvain Émard) was a 30-minute opening night dance spectacular inspired by line dancing and contemporary dance that involved over 140 volunteer dancers.

2016 – *Speed of Light* (Royal New Zealand Ballet). A programme of three contemporary dance classics – *Salon désir* (Adonis Foniadakis), *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated* (William Forsythe) and *Cacti* (Alexander Ekman).

*Source: stuff.co.nz, 26 May 2016



THE KISS INSIDE
PHOTO: PIPPA SAMAYA

2016 – *The Kiss Inside* (Douglas Wright) is “a meditation on the search for ecstasy, that buzz we are all looking for whether it’s through a chocolate éclair, a rush of heroin or an orgasm”. In its 30-year history, the Festival has commissioned a number of significant dance works by Douglas and this one was no exception.

2016 – *The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo*, although separate from the Festival, it presented a wide range of New Zealand Highland dancers and Kapa Haka performers. Alongside their Scottish counterparts they gave a breath-taking performance in the Westpac Stadium.

From a personal point of view what dance shows have you enjoyed seeing the most?

As an obsessive dance lover, stand out performances for me in the international programme have been Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui’s *Sutra* (2010) and *TeZuka* (2012), Hofesh Shechter’s *Political Mother* (2012), Fabulous Beast’s *Rian* (2014), Batsheva Dance Company’s *Deca Dance* (2014), Chunky Move’s *Complexity of Belonging* (2016) and of course, Pina Bausch’s classic *Café Muller* and *Rite of Spring*.

It is hard to choose from the New Zealand dance programme as I appreciate aspects of all the works but images of *A Kiss Inside*, *Birds with Skymirrors* and *Stones in her Mouth* will stay with me forever. The RNZB’s rendition of *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated* was breath-taking.

How does New Zealand work compare to international work?

New Zealand compares very favourably with international work. Lemi Ponifasio’s work has been commissioned by many international festivals, Ross McCormack is growing an international reputation as a choreographer and Douglas Wright has always been ahead of his time and deserves many international accolades in my view.



BIRDS WITH
SKYMIRRORS, MAU
PHOTO: SEBASTIAN
BOLESCH

Black Grace is in constant demand offshore and Atamira, Okareka, Footnote and The New Zealand Dance Company are developing international touring networks, not to mention Parris Goebel and her dance crews. I think the New Zealand dance scene is exciting and innovative with some outstanding choreographers and I look forward to the next generation of dance makers.

What have you been most proud of during your time at the New Zealand Festival?

Overall, I am proud of the extraordinarily talented team of people I work with at the Festival. Together we have successfully produced four festivals, six jazz festivals, four Lexus Song Quests and of course the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo which has been the biggest show ever staged in the Westpac Stadium.

I am proud of Shelagh’s community engagement projects. I loved seeing community dance on a grand scale in



THE RITE OF SPRING
PHOTO: MATT GRACE



LE GRAND CONTINENTAL
PHOTO: MATT GRACE

Le Grand Continental®, which opened the 2016 Festival in Civic Square followed by 5000 people taking part in a public dance off. I admire the 140 volunteer dancers

who practised every week for six months to bring this work to life.

Power Plant (2014) in the Botanical Gardens and *For the Birds* (2016) in Otari Wilton's Bush were accessible works which transformed beautiful places in Wellington and allowed us to view them in a new light.

Similarly, in 2012 Lissa Twomey engaged visual artist, Michel Tuffery, to light up Te Papa with his unforgettable

images in *First Contact*. I love how all these Festival works turn Wellington into the stage and lets us all be the players.

What do you think has been the impact on the local dance scene and how has this contributed to a vibrant and thriving dance sector in Aotearoa?

The New Zealand Festival is a major presenter and commissioner of New Zealand work, dancers are exposed to the best of international dance and masterclasses and new audiences are developed. A really good example of life changing experiences is when New Zealand dancer and choreographer, Ross McCormack, saw Belgium's *Ballet C de la B* at the 2004 Festival, wrote to the director and secured an audition and place in the company. The Festival is very grateful to DANZ for organising all the international workshops and masterclasses since its formation. ■