

# Internships

## Connecting and Creating Leaders

BY KENDALL JONES

Ufitia Sagapolutele and Trae Te Wiki talk to Kendall Jones about their experiences as interns connecting with, and learning from, current leaders of the New Zealand dance industry.



UFITIA SAGAPOLUTELE  
PHOTO: RALPH BROWN



TRAE TE WIKI  
PHOTO: ANDI CROWN  
PHOTOGRAPHY

Creative New Zealand funds two internship programmes which are particularly focused on fostering opportunities for Pacific and Māori artists. The Tautai Contemporary Pacific Arts Trust runs the Pasifika internship programme, which works to provide arts practitioners with opportunities and experiences within arts management and administration. Toi Māori offer the Māori Arts Internship (MAi) Programme, which provides opportunities for emerging Māori arts practitioners within art management, production and professional environments.

Ufitia (Tia) Sagapolutele is a current intern through the Tautai programme, developing her skills as an arts administrator working with host organisation, DANZ. She was initially attracted to the internship programme through an interest in further

understanding the realm of professional dance beyond performance and choreography. Tia explains;

“I could see myself growing and learning about all the stuff behind-the-scenes, because as a dancer and



BENEATH SKIN AND BONE, TRAE TE WIKI  
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SOOTAGA, UFITIA SAGAPOLUTELE  
PHOTO: RAYMOND SAGAPOLUTELE

a choreographer, I didn’t know anything, like all the organising behind that, and that was something I was so interested in.”

The opportunity to delve into this new learning environment came at an opportune time in Tia’s career as she moved from postgraduate study into a professional environment. She describes the internship as a “stepping stone” to achieve further career goals; she is interested in learning and growing as a professional.

Similarly, Trae Te Wiki, the 2017 intern of the Toi Māori Arts programme, pursued her internship at a moment where she desired an opportunity to learn and extend her career, as her current position at the time did not allow for this. The internship provided a well-timed opportunity to work towards a specific career goal. Trae explains, “before the internship, I’d always wanted to put on my own show, but I hadn’t, I just didn’t really know how to begin”. Interning as a project manager for Atamira presents *Atamira*, she was able to work towards this goal.

For both of these arts practitioners, the opportunity to learn through an internship was driven by a desire to connect their work with a wider community.

“I’m sick of seeing my peers study and then after they don’t have anything to go to. I feel like there’s a huge gap between studying and work, and I want to do more for that community,” says Tia.

The Tautai internship presented itself as a means to gain the skills needed to create a platform for further opportunities for her peers and future generations of Pacific artists. She decided to use her ‘stepping stone’ to actively work towards providing the same opportunity to others.

For Trae, the internship with Toi Māori and Atamira Dance Company was a perfect fit to fulfil her aspiration of being involved in a working environment with a Māori arts community.

“The kaupapa of Atamira and how it works with a te ao Māori framework, I was really excited to join in. Being

within the majority in a workplace, being Māori, that sold me,” says Trae.

For both of these arts practitioners there were lessons to be learnt through the immersion into a professional work environment.

After her internship, Trae co-produced, wrote and performed in her own show. She says it was only after putting on this show that, “I realised I actually gained so much knowledge, just being amongst Atamira”. Working with a professional company where people were getting paid to make their art produced high quality work, which impacted Trae’s approach to her own creating. “Being amongst Atamira and then doing my own thing, I just had certain expectations and I thought about my own standard of work. Talking with people and treating it like a business. It gives mana to your project.”

Tia, similarly, can sense a shift in her focus and work ethic as a choreographer within her own art-making after the internship. She reflects, “it’s really helped me with myself as an artist. The way I organise things. I feel now it’s more like a business, I want everyone to be happy, but also to make things happen, and I wouldn’t have had that confidence if it wasn’t for this internship”.

The inherent nature of a professional work environment encouraged both Tia and Trae to change some approaches

to their work. This shift has been supported by the skills they were able to develop through the internship and the relationship with their mentors.

This professional work environment has also enabled Tia to experience interacting with “important people, and being able to talk to artists”. Through this internship Tia has associated with leaders of the dance community in New Zealand, establishing connections at an early stage in her career; “I have met artists I have always looked up to, and I wouldn’t have had the opportunity if it wasn’t for DANZ and Tautai. I am achieving milestones and it’s incredible, it feels surreal.”

For Tia and Trae the benefits of undertaking an internship have emerged through the combination of developing practical skills and connections with people within the professional work environment. In conversation with these two artists, it is evident that these benefits will not only impact their own careers, but those of people around them, continuing to nourish the evolving landscape of leadership within New Zealand dance. ■

For more information on these internship programmes go to:  
[maoriart.org.nz/maiprogramme](http://maoriart.org.nz/maiprogramme) and [tautai.org](http://tautai.org).



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