



TE MATATINI

The Evolution of Kapa Haka

TE MATARAE I OREHU, ROTORUA
2011 TE MATATINI O TE RA FESTIVAL WINNERS

Earlier this year in February at the Waiohika vineyards and farm in Gisborne, an event was held that attracted more than 50,000 people over four days. There was laughter, tears, rain, political commentary, recounts of the Christchurch September quake, remembrance of soldiers fallen, rain, family feuds exposed, historical accounts of migration, and more rain.

The fact that you needed a good pair of gumboots didn't keep people away from what is the biggest Kapa Haka competition in the world. Te Matatini o Te Ra 2011 attracted record crowds, regardless of the weather. Sunday, the day of the finals, had the worst weather, but still attracted 11,000 people through the gates by lunchtime. This appeal has seen the biennial Festival evolve from a small community event in 1972 to a full-scale 'Olympics' of Kapa Haka attracting international media, performers and spectators from all over New Zealand, Canada, Hawai'i, Asia and Western Australia.

Kapa Haka (kapa = group, haka = in lines) is Māori traditional performance: a combination of dance, song, body actions, rhythm, and harmony that tells a story – historical or contemporary – in a precisely choreographed manner. It is high-energy entertainment, requiring years of rehearsal and fitness training.

Kapa Haka is one of the few cultural performances in the world where performers must sing, dance and express themselves through body language and facial expression. Kapa Haka uses voice, feet and hands, poi and taiaha, or long staffs, to provide the beat and rhythm. Compositions, all in Te Reo Māori, are made more dynamic with distinctive Māori vocal harmonies and creatively composed lyrics that reflect classical and modern Māori language imagery.

The Festival is managed by Te Matatini Society Incorporated, the national organisation for Māori performing arts that sits under the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. Te Matatini works alongside the hosting region to deliver a Festival that is now a fixture in many international cultural calendars. Darrin Apanui, Executive Director of Te Matatini Society Inc explains, "Our Festival is no longer a small

community event. It takes two years of significant planning. Host regions must now show that they have the capacity and ability to host and accommodate up to 2000 performers and 50,000 spectators. Some towns just do not have the infrastructure to do this. The tender process to host is competitive and sponsorship is significant." This was evident driving down the main street of Gisborne at the 2011 Festival. "Every hotel, motel, backpackers and camp ground had their 'no vacancy' signs out. Restaurants and fast food outlets stayed open longer and business in the week of the Festival spiked in what is traditionally a slow down period after Christmas holidays. We believe our Festival is great for business wherever we go, because we certainly bring crowds."

Te Matatini is responsible for fostering, developing and protecting traditional Māori performing arts. This ensures quality kapa haka and Māori performing arts are promoted nationally and internationally. However, it is not limited to the international Festival, Te Matatini also supports regional and national school kapa haka competitions that guarantees the survival and development of traditional Māori performing arts. "We love supporting school kids around the country. It's part of a long-term strategy for investing in the future of traditional performance, composition, and it has a positive effect on the students themselves. The confidence they gain, performing in something that belongs to them and to this nation lifts their aspirations in other dimensions of their lives: their school work, relationships with their peers and adults, attitude, sport, right across the board" says Darrin.

Internationally, Kapa Haka is unique to Aotearoa New Zealand as Carnival is to Brazil. Tourism, of which Kapa Haka and Māori tourism is a major component, brings in over \$15 billion dollars annually to the national GDP. Interest was evident with media attending from Canada, Asia, Hawai'i, and Australia. The BBC and Getty Images also had representatives attend. To provide for this, Te Matatini has been using Hakarongo Mai, a simultaneous translation service that provides headsets and can be broadcast over MP3 and personal radios at the venue. "This service is proving to be more and more popular each year," explains Darrin. "We are noticing a growing attendance by international visitors, and having simultaneous live-streaming translation services enables them to be included in the energy and passion of the moment on stage."

Māori tourism and cultural performance is part of the New Zealand identity, reinforced by the Haka performed by the All Black Rugby team. The up and coming Rugby World Cup is one event that Te Matatini will be leveraging their role as the national Māori Performing Arts Organisation. Using Kapa Haka to showcase the breadth of expression through Māori performing arts, *Arohanui – The Greatest Love*, will be a live 90-minute show during the 2011 Rugby World Cup. It is the classic tale of forbidden love that comes to life in the midst of a bitter war.

Arohanui will showcase the beauty, grace and vibrancy of Kapa Haka through waiata tangi – laments, invigorating haka, and choreographed war scenes, to the rhythmical beat and flow of the poi, the technicality of Māori games and the natural harmonies of Māori song. "This stage show will reach a wide range of audiences to demonstrate how traditional cultural expressions, in particular love, hate, war and passion, can tell stories. It will provide a unique cultural tourism experience for international visitors."

Kapa Haka in some ways is an oral Māori google. Compositions are a way of recording history, with many based on historical and current events. An example of this is a Northland composition, *I te tekau ma wha: In the 14th year*. This recalls and identifies people and locations of the first Christian church service held in this country in the Bay of Islands in 1814. It is still being performed today. The most recent Festival held this year in Gisborne saw groups performing events relevant to them. Christchurch based group Te Kotahitanga performed their opening Haka talking and enacting the September earthquake, while a Tuhoe based group spoke of the recent 'Tuhoe Raids'. "Kapa Haka and Māori performing arts are certainly not static. It is a form of recording and story-telling through movement and performance," says Darrin.

Over the last 30 years, Kapa Haka has evolved. Costumes have become more vibrant, and new compositions have become regular features in schools and public events. Off shoots of the Festival have emerged including secondary school competitions, the revival of inter-marae Kapa Haka events and the annual Super 12 event held in Gisborne. "The Super 12's is more contemporary, where you have only 12 performers on stage. It can be choreographed a lot more and



TE MATARAE I OREHU, ROTORUA
2011 TE MATATINI
O TE RA FESTIVAL
WINNERS

has a wide appeal to the younger teen audiences. This is an event that allows younger people to express themselves more freely, moving away from the more traditional aspects of the biennial Festival. This just proves that Kapa Haka is not a static art form that belongs in history – it moves with the times," says Darrin.

Te Matarae I Orehu, a Rotorua based team, won the 2011 Festival. A relatively new team on the Kapa Haka stage, first performing in 1996, their unique and energetic style has been watched carefully over the years by many groups who have tried to take elements of their stage persona and duplicate it. Darrin is pleased with the result, "The Te Arawa (Rotorua) region had strong representation at this year's Festival with five teams competing in a line-up of 42 teams. Having one of their teams win was fitting, as they will be hosting the next Festival in 2013. This is really their opportunity to showcase their region."

Winning teams are the national representatives of Māori performing arts for the duration of their winning term. International events that require a New Zealand delegation take the winning team with them. "New Zealand is really good at making an entrance to any international event, be it Venice Biennale, World Expo or International conferences. Because we tend to have different winners every two years, we have fresh representation. It also provides the best of the best of Māori performing arts in the World." ■

Okareka Dance Company presents

Choreographed by
TAANE METE
TAIAROA ROYAL
ROSS MCCORMACK

NGĀ
HAU
E
WHĀ

where the elements dance

WED 29 JUNE – SAT 9 JULY

Te Whaea Theatre, National Dance and Drama Centre
 11 Hutchison Road, Newtown, Wellington

Bookings
WWW.TICKETEK.CO.NZ
 PHONE 0800 TICKETEK (0800 842 538)

Adults \$35, Child \$20
 Group bookings (6+) \$28
 Concessions \$28, Student \$20

Contains semi nudity
www.okareka.com

Okareka is proudly supported by