



# THEATREVIEW

## 2022-23 in brief

Life has been hit and miss sometimes over this year. COVID-19 still debilitates large numbers of people, and storms and floods have devastated many. For the performing arts, the number of productions which made it to performance continued to be relatively low. Theatreview had ongoing funding challenges in common with much of Aotearoa New Zealand, and with most of the performing arts; however, it found ways to support as many practitioners as possible, by continuing to review, celebrate and record the work and visions which did reach the stage or online, and to give prospective audiences context and inspiration.

Theatreview has kept serving the theatre and dance industries of Aotearoa and their audiences, with a national and regional reach. Our website is the only place where most dance productions will receive a review. The stable of strong, insightful and erudite writers continues to grow. The breadth of established and emerging writers reflects the diversity of New Zealand's culture. With its national coverage, Theatreview serves long-standing Kahikatea and Totara clients of Creative New Zealand, as well as high calibre independent and emerging artists. It plays a pivotal role in the development of theatre and dance in Aotearoa, reaching widely to inform audiences throughout Aotearoa – the motu.

Through the help of generous voluntary Associate Editors theatre reviewing in the regions was managed even more widely. In July Theatreview took time to conduct a survey among approximately 1,360 members, donors and other stakeholders to understand how and when the website is used, and thoughts on how it could serve everyone better. In spite of a lack of funding for the management of dance reviewing in the latter half of the year Tania Kopytko generously took on the NZ-wide role on a pro bono basis and our arts professional who usually manages dance took a sabbatical overseas.

A very welcome grant from Creative New Zealand made it possible for Theatreview's small team to commission a redesign of the website. With the skill, extremely hard work and generosity of Dartworks Design, the redesigned website went live on 1<sup>st</sup> of February - to much acclaim.

Theatreview's resources continue to depend on donations, grants and an abundance of good will. Sustainable funding was and is a continuous major issue.

## Funding

Our treasured donors continued to support us through PressPatron with a modest but highly valued flow of income, the Wellington City Council continued to support our management of reviewing to cover the Wellington region, the Aotearoa Gaming Trust continued to support published reviewing of professional dance productions throughout Aotearoa NZ and provided 6 months of the fee for the dance editor in 2022 and 2023, Waitematā Council made a small grant to support theatre reviewing in Auckland in February and March, and Creative New Zealand gave the grant to redesign the website. The website was launched, Auckland theatre reviewing was expanded, Wellington reviewing continued, and dance reviewing throughout Aotearoa was supported for 6 months. The grants and support were hugely welcome. Theatreview is immensely appreciative to all.

As is the case for most performing arts, funding is being constantly sought. A strong intention is more fully to fund the work of the two arts professionals who manage the reviewing, commissioning and publishing, as well as to cover the costs to keep the website online. We still aim to find a way to make it possible to pay our talented, and generous, voluntary reviewers.

Reviewing continued throughout the year, on as close to the usual basis as possible, thanks to the support we did receive and in very large part – and with much gratitude - to many hundreds of hours of donated time.

## Some of the statistics

### WHERE THE PERFORMANCES WERE DURING 2022-23:

**North Island:** Whangarei, Auckland, Hamilton, South Waikato, Whanganui, New Plymouth, Hastings, Napier, Palmerston North, Wairarapa, Paraparaumu, Porirua, Wellington.

**South Island:** Nelson, Takaka, Christchurch, Hawea, Wanaka, Dunedin.

**NZ-Wide/Live stream, Global (online)**

### HOW THE WEBSITE WAS USED:

Unique visitors	88,043
Number of sessions	120,870
Total pages viewed	207,308
From: - New Zealand	66.10%
and internationally:	
- USA	8.98%
- Australia	6.72%
- UK	4.35%
- India	1.39%
- and others	12.46%

AS AT 31 March 2023, 17 years since Theatreview went live at the beginning of 2006, the website holds the details, people, visions and reviews of more than 7,800 productions.

## The funders – with many thanks

### Our donors

Absolutely Positively  
**Wellington City Council**  
Me Heke Ki Pōneke



AOTEAROA  
**GAMING  
TRUST**



The Theatreview Trust, incorporated, and registered in 2011 with the New Zealand Charities Commission: CC45963.

As at 31 March 2023 the Trustees are:

**Dawn Sanders** ONZM, QSM: Chair; **Marjorie McKee**: Treasurer; **Bette Cosgrove, Sally Thorburn, John Smythe**.

## THE BACKGROUND

### The purpose, and the mission

To create and publish on-line reviews and archival records of Aotearoa New Zealand's performing arts practice, for:

- the public in communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand for whom a work is made and on whose behalf the critics write
- the practitioners who create publicly available shows and need to see what they make reflected, in order to contribute to their professional development
- ongoing audience and practitioner commentary, feedback, debate and conversation
- the historical record of performing arts practice in Aotearoa New Zealand – a comprehensive, globally accessible and readily searchable on-line heritage archive of the people, visions and places of those productions, and of those reviews and discussions.

### The editorial team and the webmaster

**John Smythe** is the founder and managing editor for [www.theatreview.org.nz](http://www.theatreview.org.nz) and its senior theatre critic, John Smythe is a Trustee of The Theatreview Trust, as well as being its Editor (Theatre). He has a Bachelor of Dramatic Arts from the National Institute of Dramatic Art and a certificate in screenwriting from the Australian Film Television and Radio School.

Starting in Gang Shows and David Tinkham's Wellington Rep pantomimes, training in the Aro Valley with Nola Millar and her tutors, touring with the NZ Players Drama Quartet and participating in the early years of Downstage set John off on decades of wide-ranging professional experience as an actor, playwright, screen writer, tutor and theatre critic – in New Zealand, Australia then back in New Zealand. For many years now he has been Wellington-based.

He has served as a theatre critic for *The Melbourne Times*, *The Australian*, *Theatre Australia Magazine* – and, in New Zealand, the *National Business Review* and *Theatreview*.

John has served on the Board of Studies for Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School and as Vice President then President of the New Zealand Writers Guild (and before that the Australian Writers Guild), serving on a range on industry boards, and attending (and helping to host) a number of International Affiliation of Writers Guilds meetings in the process.

John's non-fiction book titles include *Downstage Upfront: the first 40 years of New Zealand's longest running professional theatre* (Victoria University Press, 2004) and *The Plays of Bruce Mason – a survey* (VUP & Playmarket, 2015).

**Lyne Pringle**, took the role of Editor (Dance) New Zealand-wide at the beginning of 2021. She has been a Trustee and is *Theatreview's* senior dance critic.

Lyne began reviewing dance for *Theatreview* in 2007. Since 2019 she has also reviewed for the *Dominion Post*. Over 42 years as a dance/theatre artist in New Zealand, Australia and New York Lyne has gained a rich understanding of the needs and challenges of the sector. She has worked with many of the leading dance artists in Aotearoa, has received numerous awards and is deeply committed to the development of New Zealand performing arts.

Recent awards include a 2016 Life Time Achievement Award from the Dance Industry, the 2012 James Wallace Artistic Residency at the Pah Homestead, and the 2011 Otago University Caroline Fellowship - Community Dance.

Lyne now concentrates on supporting the wider sector, writing and social/eco activism. She is passionate about volunteering, her activities in this area include: leading *Bring Back the Natives* - a

community planting project in her home suburb of Newtown; writing and advising about dance; kaka nest monitor at Zealandia; kaitiaki of community fruit trees in Newtown. She is the Employee/Corporate Volunteering Manager at Volunteer Wellington.

As well as writing for other publications, she teaches dance studies at the New Zealand School of Dance, is an oral historian for the New Zealand Dance Archive and a member of the Artistic Advisory Panel for Footnote New Zealand Dance.

**Associate Theatre Editors** during the year have included **Lisa Warrington, Angela Trolove, Damian Pullen, Dave Taylor, Ruth Allison** and **Lexie Matheson**.

**Sascha Monteiro** from PureJS has worked with Theatreview since 2008. He is an experienced engineer and developer. His skills include JavaScript, Java, PL/SQL, Servlet, JSP, PHP, HTML, CSS, SOAP, REST Linux, Oracle, Apex, Tomcat, VMWare, MySQL.

Until the end of January he maintained the website, troubleshoot issues, and monitored and maintained site security. With the opening of the redesigned site in February he continues as an invaluable resource of IT advice, and manages aspects allied to the bedding in of the new site and to Theatreview's online presence.

## The reviewers

The reviewers are nationwide volunteers, willing to share their insights and expertise in return for two complimentary tickets, most with practical experience in the performing arts and many with professional training in the sector. They are local. They can be:

- peer-group practitioners (either present or past), academics, students and experienced specialists;
- core regulars, fresh voices, and those who come on board for particular productions or festivals.

Their experience and insight include relevant cultures, genres, generations, affiliations, gender identity and sexual orientation.

## Some comments from supporters over 2022-23 and recently

"Theatreview reviews are ... topical, accurate and professional critiques ... The[y] undoubtedly give value and important weight to the quality of a production ... [They can be] incredibly important and insightful... Theatreview reviews help to validate quality work for many years, and help to build artists' reputations."

**Vanessa Preston** publicist and then PR Manager for Auckland Theatre Company *February 2023*

"We worked on some of the things you wrote about in your review, it was really really useful to have (the clowning expert) in the room."

**Caspar Ilchner**, emerging artist, following a review, collaboration with a specialist facilitated by Theatreview, and a highly successful second iteration *June 2022*

"Thank you SO much for your beautifully thought through and well written reviews. I am sure the artists are as grateful as I am for the vital role reviews play in the reflection and ongoing life of a work."

**Shona McCullough**, director Auckland Arts Festival *April 2022*

"To me, dance reviewing is a critical aspect of making dance visible, legible and educative in the broader community (and internationally) ... Reviews are vital and good reviewers are gold."

**Jack Gray**, Artistic Director and **Tracy Marama Lloyd**, Executive Director - Atamira Dance Company *2021*

“The ecology of dance and theatre in Aotearoa would undoubtedly be less rich without Theatreview.”

**Richard Aindow**, General Manager - Footnote New Zealand Dance 2021

“...many Theatreview reviewers are industry professionals and this provides an assurance of critical knowledge of the sector. In an era where reviews in printed publications are harder to come by ... and there is a competitive environment for reviews in other online platforms – I believe Theatreview provides a vital through-line for the industry, as by and large they will make every effort to review your work if you want it reviewed...[They are building] the pool of reviewers to expand Theatreview’s writing base to include a more diverse range of perspectives. I find this particularly valuable, and essential, for the quality reviewing of Māori and Pasifika ... work”

**Dolina Weihepeihana**, Creative Producer - Betsy and Mana Productions 2021

“Theatreview is an indispensable tool for theatre audiences, practitioners, drama teachers and students at all levels of secondary and tertiary education. Theatreview’s comprehensive reviewing of theatre and dance across the country (and relevant overseas productions as well) has created a massive archive of New Zealand theatre which no other organisation can match... As an almost daily user of Theatreview, I am impressed by the professional way in which it is run. Reviews by Theatreview’s in-house reviewers are always posted in a very timely fashion, usually coming out before reviews in other media. Information about forthcoming events, job vacancies, new appointments, obituaries and numerous other significant events is professionally collated and disseminated. There is no other organisation or publication that does this work for the theatre community.

In my role as a university teacher, I see the vast benefits that Theatreview brings to students and postgraduate researchers. The website enables students to research widely about particular playwrights, actors, directors and forms of theatre. Students sometimes join in Theatreview’s debates about controversial productions, and such debates have become the topic of heated tutorial discussion in the past ... The democratic basis on which Theatreview enables audiences to participate in public critical debates provides a unique forum and increases the relevance of live theatre among young people and in the wider community. Essays and theses on New Zealand theatre are often constructed around review quotes sourced from Theatreview. Some of our graduates from the Theatre Programme have themselves become reviewers for Theatreview. I often see quotes from Theatreview reviews in scholarly publications, as well as in funding applications for individuals and theatre companies.

In my work as a researcher, I use the Theatreview archive when writing articles about New Zealand theatre. I know that many of my colleagues do the same. There are still many significant gaps in the writing of New Zealand theatre history, and the continuity of Theatreview is essential to this history being preserved, debated and analysed.”

**David O’Donnell**, Professor of Theatre, Te Herenga Waka/Victoria University of Wellington 2021

“Theatreview is a ... resource bar none. The inventiveness and energy of this agency and the dedication to the theatre arts is outstanding. Regionally during the lockdown period, Theatreview kept patrons and interested parties...in touch with virtual activities and radio plays. In addition the agency has developed a regional network of top shelf reviewers and contributors and continues to be the gold standard for quality and reach...The archive is invaluable, recording theatre productions the length of the country.”

**Steve Thomas**, Artistic Director, Arts On Tour New Zealand 2020

“Through the ever growing archive on Theatreview we have a potted history of our productions and our continued presence as part of the Wellington and New Zealand theatre scene, this provides a unique historical record, one not captured anywhere else. Part of our company ethos is to tour: testing our work on the road, and finding new audiences outside the main centres of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. Many of the places we have taken our shows Theatreview has provided the only possible platform for a review – the website is unparalleled in its scope across the country. Reviews are a key part of the eco-structure for theatre and live performance, and Theatreview is an essential resource for reviews within New Zealand.”

**Hannah Smith and Ralph McCubbin Howell, Trick of the Light Theatre 2020**