



# THEATREVIEW

## 2023-24 in brief

The long tail of pandemic is still with us but audiences and practitioners are also with us, and vibrant. Despite the damper of COVID-19, performing arts in Aotearoa are in good heart. 2024 in particular started with a roar with a near record number of performances reviewed in the first three months of the year.

Theatre review remained resilient and found very much valued funding to maintain its services, now under the banner of a newly gifted te reo name.

Theatre review was able to continue to critique, celebrate and record the work and visions of performing artists on stage or online, to serve Aotearoa New Zealand's theatre and dance and give audiences context and inspiration, to take up again some of the Auckland theatre reviewing which had to be severely limited under recent restricted funding, and to continue to give the immensely varied performance of our motu regional, national and international coverage, free and online on a newly designed web platform.

Towards the end of 2023 Theatre review was gifted the reo name of Te Whare Tapere Tirohanga Hou. We received this with enormous gratitude to Rakauoteora Te Maipi QSM, Koro Don (Tuhoe, Te Aitanga a Mahaki, Te Arawa), and to Sally Thorburn the Trustee who steered the final stages of the long process through with sensitivity and dedicated care. Whare Tapere are described as iwi-community 'houses' of storytelling, dance, music, puppets, games and other entertainments, Tirohanga relates to viewpoint, sight, investigation, optics, and Hou describes it as new, recent, modern, fresh.

The stable of insightful and diverse writers continued to grow. Theatre review held two workshops to develop theatre and dance reviewing skills among aspiring reviewers across a wide range of backgrounds, ages, cultures, experience, and approaches to the art of critique and of writing.

New reviewers across the country from these and other initiatives brought unique fresh reviewing voices to the team to share the many facets of Aotearoa New Zealand performance.

Theatre review's redesigned website was increasingly enjoyed and valued. In March we received a grant supporting a further finetune to expand the website's value for users. When funding is possible, work on our taonga of historic data will consolidate that value.

Within the Trust itself, changes have included:

- the regretted loss of one of our Trustees who stepped back from the Trust with family concerns, and the appointment of four new Trustees; the loss also, in February, of the Trust's long-standing and very much valued Chair who sadly stepped back from the Trust
- Taiaroa Royal, honoured choreographer and dancer delighted us by accepting our invitation to become one of Theatre review's patrons. Dawn Sanders, our newly departed Chair and honoured dance and theatre specialist then delighted us by agreeing to be our second patron

- the forming of an editorial advisory panel as a source for Editors and the Trust of wide-ranging external industry experience and understanding, and a pool of thought on policy and issues
- an update of the Trust Deed, prompted by recent law changes affecting charitable trusts.

It is worth reflecting here that Theatreview's services are unique in Aotearoa.

Productions reviewed range from those by major performing arts companies to co-ops and individuals performing in smaller venues and/or in Fringe Festivals. Venues range from far north to deep south. They range from city to regional. Theatreview traces beginnings and development. It serves audiences, artists, arts industry and researchers. It covers the work of long-standing major theatre and dance houses as well as of high calibre independent and emerging artists. It will cover final year productions from fulltime training institutions and youth theatre productions directed by professionals, to productions not acknowledged elsewhere (in order to recognise 'alternative' practitioners and emerging talents whose fresh approaches revitalise the sector), to touring productions as they finetune and learn. Its archive of this is a unique taonga.

It is a vital and intrinsic part of the national performing arts infrastructure, and the only service of its kind to have the current backing of Creative New Zealand funding.

Theatreview is always extremely appreciative of the support and connection we have across the industry and with our audiences. We cannot continue our work as a national service, reflecting the vibrant professional performing arts, without a wide network of support.

Our resources continue to depend on grants, donations and an abundance of good will. Sustainable long-term funding was and is a continuous major issue.

## Some of the statistics

*WHERE THE PERFORMANCES WERE DURING 2023-24:*

**North Island:** Auckland, Hamilton, Tauranga, Rotorua, New Plymouth, Gisborne, Hastings, Palmerston North, Paraparaumu, Upper Hutt, Lower Hutt, Wellington.

**South Island:** Nelson, Christchurch, Lyttelton, Wanaka, Dunedin.

**Global (online), Bookstores**

*HOW THE WEBSITE WAS USED:*

Unique visitors	95,878
Number of sessions	142,408
Total pages viewed	257,133
From: - New Zealand	74.10%
and internationally:	
- USA	5.66%
- Australia	5.25%
- UK	3.14%
- others	11.85%

AS AT 31 March 2024, the website holds 13,820 reviews, and the details, people and visions of more than 8,270 productions.

## Funding

While our reviewing teams continue to offer thousands of hours of time and services for free, we cannot operate without funding which supports a limited financial stipend to our Editors and Managing Editor, and the costs of maintaining the website and Charities Services requirements.

In mid 2023, Creative New Zealand followed their extremely welcome support for redesign of the website with a vital 12-month grant across 2023 and 2024 for the operational costs of Theatreview itself. Creative New Zealand has supported Theatreview similarly in the past, and it was a considerable relief that they were able to resume.

The Aotearoa Gaming Trust continued to support published reviewing of professional dance productions throughout Aotearoa NZ into the first part of 2023. In March 2024 they made a greatly appreciated grant to support work to finetune the website.

Wellington City Council continued to support our management of reviewing to cover the Wellington region, Auckland Council supported our management of theatre reviewing in Auckland. Management of regional theatre reviewing was further supported in Christchurch and Dunedin through the grant from Creative New Zealand. Our treasured donors continued to support us through PressPatron with a modest but highly valued flow of income.

Those grants underpinned everything we have done this year. The funding, the donations and the support were all hugely welcome. Theatreview is immensely appreciative.

As is the case for most performing arts, funding is being constantly sought. We still aim to find a way to make it possible to pay our talented, and generous, voluntary reviewers.

Reviewing continued throughout the year thanks to the support we received and thanks in very large part – and with much gratitude - to the thousands of hours of donated time our passionate team put in.

## The funders – with many thanks

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



**AOTEAROA  
GAMING  
TRUST**



Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau

**creative nz**  
ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND TOI AOTEAROA

**Our donors**

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

At 31 March 2024 the Patrons are:

**Taiaroa Royal, Dawn Sanders** ONZM, QSM,

and the Trustees are:

**Bette Cosgrove**: Chair; **Marjorie McKee**: Treasurer; **John Smythe, Dan Slevin, Mitchell Manuel, Brigitte Knight, Iosefa Enari** MNZM.

## 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 wide-ranging, 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 IT

**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 is concentrating on broadening the base of contributing writers in order to better reflect the diversity of dance culture in Aotearoa, to ensure that *Theatreview* remains relevant and has an ongoing life.

Her career in dance began in 1979 with Impulse Dance Theatre. Forty-six years of experience working as a dance/theatre artist in New Zealand, Australia and New York has given Lyne a rich and nuanced understanding of how success can be cultivated and the needs and challenges of the sector. She is deeply committed to the development of New Zealand performing arts.

Lyne has created and produced over 30 dance works which have been performed nationally and internationally. She has received numerous awards and has worked with many of the leading dance

artists in Aotearoa. Her career in dance and theatre has received funding from Creative New Zealand (formerly the New Zealand Arts Council) from 1979 until 2018.

She retired from creating and presenting her own dance work in 2014 to concentrate on supporting the wider sector, writing and social/eco activism.

At the Tempo Dance Festival in 2016 she was chosen as the annual Honouree for her lifetime commitment to dance.

As well as writing for other publications, she is a senior Lecturer teaching dance studies at the New Zealand School of Dance, is an oral historian for the New Zealand Dance Archive and since 2019 is the dance reviewer for The Post.

**Associate Theatre Editors** were **Lexie Matheson** in Auckland, **Julie McCloy** in Christchurch and **Lisa Warrington** in Dunedin.

**Sascha Monteiro** from PureJS has worked with Theatreview since 2008 as the Webmaster. 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. With the opening of the redesigned site he continues as IT consultant and as an invaluable resource of IT advice, and manages other aspects of Theatreview's online presence. The website is managed by **Dartworks**.

## 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 2023-24

"As publicist for two of NZ's largest professional performing arts organisations...the reviews from Theatreview reviewers have always been incredibly valuable in my work.

Theatreview reviews are always turned around quickly, are topical, accurate and professional critiques... The reviews undoubtedly give value and important weight to the quality of a production, which helps with word-of-mouth ticket sales...Theatreview reviews help to validate quality work for many years, and help to build artists' reputations"

**Vanessa Preston**, Freelance Arts Publicist *March 2024*

"Theatreview plays a crucial role in the cultural landscape by providing comprehensive reviews and archiving performing arts practice across the country. This service is highly valued by practitioners and audiences alike."

**Padina Akula**, Producer | Kaihautu, Q Theatre *March 2024*

"Theatreview provides a highly valued space online where work is recorded in the art form of writing documentation and discussion – a space where the ephemeral nature of live

performance is captured. It provides formality, visibility and longevity to artists' work... Writing intelligently or encouragingly about our live performance work in this country provides the audience with reference points and documentation of an artist's history as well as information about the actual work on hand. People like to research - the reviews are what is left behind, particularly in the case of dance and performance art. The reviews become a useful and valuable tool - especially for artists touring work regionally ...a highly valued part of the ecosystem of dance...

There was a significant range of perspectives [on a MOTH touring work] provided by Theatreview writers as it toured from town to town. We were impressed by the range of writers across the country and the level of insight and commentary they provided about this significant work. This will now become part of a unique historical record... gives us new portals or creative information about what we have witnessed - deepening our own responses."

**Malia Johnston** Artistic Director, MOVEMENT OF THE HUMAN April 2023

"Theatreview...are known for the quality of reviews and their support of New Zealand playwrights and creatives...the depth of what they offer to the performing arts industry. It is a vital resource for reflecting and recording the work of PANNZ and the wider industry. It is able to provide a voice for these works through the reviews, providing valuable insights to both future audiences and programmers of work. The enriching feedback is hugely valued, in order to maintain standards and track the progress of work and an artist.

Theatreview's upgraded website is excellent, easy to use and makes for an even better archive of our performing arts heritage...

Theatreview...is an important part of the NZ arts eco-system."

**Louise Gallagher**, CEO, PANNZ (Performing Arts Network of NZ) April 2023

"Theatreview is an indispensable tool for theatre audiences, practitioners, drama teachers and students at all levels of secondary and tertiary education. Theatreview...has created a massive archive of New Zealand theatre which no other organisation can match...

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..., and such debates have become the topic of heated tutorial discussion in the past... Essays and theses on New Zealand theatre are often constructed around review quotes sourced from 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 April 2023

As a senior communications consultant and arts administrator who works across the length and breadth of Aotearoa for many clients in arts and culture, I can personally vouch for the value of Theatreview in promoting the sector and building audiences across New Zealand.

Across the majority of my clients, which currently includes Royal New Zealand Ballet, Auckland Arts Festival, World of Wearable Arts, Auckland Arts Festival, Kia Mau, and the Michael Hill International Violin Competition, among others, reviews are a vital part of both promoting the arts and in audience development. With decreasing space in mainstream media for arts across the board, Theatreview has picked up the mantle for the sector and continues to

provide solid support across all performing art forms, but especially theatre, dance and festivals... My clients and I continue to quote Theatreview reviews across our digital and communications channels...

In my experience of working with them over the last decade, Theatreview has access to number of experienced and well-qualified reviewers across the country, and not just in the main centres, but also into cities and regions which don't typically cover the arts. Many of their reviewers are former performers and art-form specialists. Not only that, at times I have boldly suggested Theatreview engage a reviewer with a specific perspective – e.g. Māori, Pasifika, female or queer – so their review can be shaped by those whose viewpoints align with the story on stage. Every time, the team have been open and amenable to the idea, and acted quickly to ensure their reviews also offer diverse perspectives.

**Siobhan Waterhouse** Siobhan Waterhouse Communications Ltd April 2023

## ... and recently

"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

"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

"...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...Theatreview...will make every effort to review your work if you want it reviewed...[the] diverse range of perspectives (is) particularly valuable, and essential, for the quality reviewing of Māori and Pasifika work"

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

"Theatreview is a...resource bar none. The inventiveness and energy of this agency and the dedication to the theatre arts is outstanding ...The archive is invaluable, recording theatre productions the length of the country."

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

"Theatreview ... provides a unique historical record, one not captured anywhere else ... 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