



THEATREVIEW

2024-25 in brief

Theatre and dance in Aotearoa New Zealand, always vibrant, is flourishing. Theatre review continued to publish critique of professional productions, from the profoundly moving, sometimes awe-inspiring, to the impressively dramatic, quirky, playful, experimental, exuberant.

Theatre review itself has been incredibly resilient, in a difficult funding climate. We were able to expand and finetune our website. Our team continued to grow. We continued to critique, celebrate and record the work, practice and visions of performing artists on stage or online, to give audiences context and inspiration, to serve Aotearoa New Zealand's theatre and dance, and to give the immensely varied performance across our motu national and international coverage, and a free and online record in the growing archive on our website. Use of the website, always high, has climbed.

Our funding (from July) was a different matter, as outlined below. The interruption in funding has called on considerable time and energy from the small number of voluntary Trustees. They worked to find future funding, initiated fundraising campaigns – to which donors responded with generosity – and expanded and finetuned our social media presence. The work continues.

Theatre review was also given the support of yet more donated hours from our editors and associate editors to enable the continuation of critique after July as far as possible.

We again received generous donations of voluntary hours from our increasing stable of insightful and diverse reviewers. Over 150 critics wrote reviews in the year. They write across a wide range of backgrounds, of fresh and unique voices, of ages, cultures, experience, and approaches to the art of critique and of writing.

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 ranged from far north to deep south, from cities to smaller regions. Theatre review 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 also covers 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 develop and learn.

Theatre review's services are unique in Aotearoa. Its archive is a taonga spanning almost two decades of professional theatre and dance performance in the motu.

Theatre review 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 that wide network.

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

Some of the statistics 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

WHERE THE PERFORMANCES WERE:

North Island: Whangārei, Auckland, Hamilton, Rotorua, New Plymouth, Gisborne, Hastings, Palmerston North, Raumati, Lower Hutt, Wellington.

South Island: Nelson, Christchurch, Lyttelton, Wānaka, Dunedin.

Global, NZ-wide, Bookstores

WHAT WAS PUBLISHED, and ARCHIVED:

535 **reviews** by 158 **critics**, of 403 **productions**

HOW THE WEBSITE WAS USED:

| | |
|----------------------|---------|
| Unique visitors | 108,928 |
| Number of sessions | 156,529 |
| Total pages viewed | 273,516 |
| From: - New Zealand | 71.42% |
| and internationally: | |
| - USA | 6.89% |
| - Australia | 5.74% |
| - UK | 2.91% |
| - others | 13.05% |

AT 31 March 2025, the website holds over 14,350 reviews, and the details, people and visions of 8,590 productions.

Funding

While our reviewing teams continue to offer thousands of hours of time and services for free, we cannot operate without funding towards a stipend for the arts professionals who fill the roles of the editors and Managing Editor, and towards the costs of maintaining the website and Charities Services requirements.

Until July last year, Creative New Zealand gave deeply appreciated support for much of Theatreview's operational costs. Creative New Zealand has supported Theatreview similarly in the past, and it was greatly valued that they had been able to resume.

However, following July Theatreview was one of many arts organisations that missed out on Creative New Zealand funding for the next year (CNZ was only able to grant 22% of what was sought). We then had no future funding for our two national editors, our Managing Editor and most of our regional editors to continue their vital work, and for our website.

Wellington City Council continued to support our management of reviewing in the Wellington region, and extended its support into 2026 as well. Waitematā (from July to September) and the Auckland Council (from October) stepped in to support our management of theatre reviewing in Auckland. Our treasured supporters responded generously to an appeal for funds, and existing donors continued to support us with a modest but highly valued flow of income. The Aotearoa Gaming Trust generously supported finetuning of the website with a grant towards its further development, and from February this year (continuing until the end of July), again gave a very greatly appreciated grant to support published reviewing of professional dance productions throughout Aotearoa NZ. PatronBase stepped in to give us a fundraising platform with greatly reduced fees, and to give an ongoing contribution in recognition of a space among a note of our donors. Generous donations together with our limited reserves were able to fund a small short-term contribution to a stipend for the regional theatre editors and the Managing Editor.

Theatreview still has no future funding for much of its operation.

Much of the work for managing the reviews has continued, where it could, on the back of donated hours.

We continue to seek the funds needed for the professionals involved, and for the website on which the reviews are published and which holds the treasure of the archive. As is the case for most performing arts, funding is constantly being sought to continue our existence. In addition, we still aim also to find a way to make it possible to pay our talented, and generous, voluntary reviewers.

The grants and donations which were given underpinned everything we have done this year. They were all hugely welcome. Theatre review is immensely appreciative. Theatre review pays tribute to the generous support, both in funds and in energy, it has been given. Reviewing continued throughout the year thanks to the support we did receive and thanks, again, in very large part – and with much gratitude - to the thousands of hours of donated time our dedicated team put in.

The funders variously through the year – with many thanks

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



**AOTEAROA
GAMING
TRUST**

**Auckland
Council**
Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau

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

**Waitematā
Local Board**
Auckland Council

 **PatronBase**

Our donors

THE THEATREVIEW TRUST, incorporated and registered in 2011 with the New Zealand Charities Commission:, CC45963.

At 31 March 2025 the Patrons are:

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

and the Trustees are:

Bette Cosgrove: Chair; **Marjorie McKee**: Treasurer; **John Smythe**, **Mitchell Manuel**, **Brigitte Knight**, **Iosefa Enari** MNZM, **David O'Donnell**, **Dr Elizabeth Hitchings**.

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 of www.theatreview.org.nz. He is its managing editor, senior theatre critic, national editor (theatre) and a trustee of The Theatreview Trust. John 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.

In 2015 John's play *Where There's a Will* premièred at BATS, in which he played Barry Scanlan. Among many roles on stage and screen, he has played Polonius and the Gravedigger in two productions of *Hamlet* (2006; 2011), and Carl Jung, Samuel Beckett and James Joyce in *Dancing in the Wake* by Jan Bolwell (2013).

John's published books include *The Peace Monster* (Vintage, 1991), *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 worked with Theatreview from 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 redesign of the website in February 2023 he continues as IT consultant and an invaluable resource of IT advice, and manages other aspects of Theatreview's online presence. The website itself is now 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 2024-25

"Theatreview is an important platform for performing artists, students and audiences where reviews are more thorough and well-informed than an internet blog, and much more extensive than the limits of a newspaper review ever could be. For artists, they provide a useful critique and a means to communicate the significance of their work to funders and audiences. For students, the platform is invaluable in their research into performances. Moreover, Theatreview provides prospective audience members with an intelligent and well-informed analysis of a performance, thus helping with choice-making. Finally, Theatreview serves as an indispensable record of productions, including collating other links. It is all too easy for a production or a company to vanish when this information is not readily made available, which has consequences for the artistic health of a region and for future plans for theatre makers .

Hilary Halba, Ryan Hartigan, Martyn Roberts (Ōtepoti theatre artists and academics from Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka/the University of Otago), 2025

"Reviews are of huge benefit for us, as they help describe the experience that people do have, which we can't do or say ourselves as the makers. This gives a reviewer's words an objective weight to be able to uplift the impressions that connect potential audiences and viewers with both the company and the show...

It is truly pleasing to receive feedback that represents the diversity of insights, interests and knowledges of the writers [and] that demonstrated the nuances of cultural narrative and community resonance. We learn about the types of regional audiences and their expectations

and see what is being commonly received and felt on more universal levels. Obviously the feedback is a direct encouragement to the validity of the artists involved and increases the sense of mana for the work.

I have always been grateful for the longevity of Theatreview and the custodianship over time. ... having a nationally centred space for arts commentary keeps the conversation alive and interconnected [and] archive[d] - a way for the creative whakapapa to be housed."

Jack Gray, former Artistic Director Atamira Dance Company, 2024

"I haven't lost the pleasure of reading a good review, a little compensation for a 'housebound' ... Mobility zilch but I can see and hear and with so many resources, the hours rush by ... [and] I live through the music, drama etc. provided by your excellent service."

A past theatre practitioner, dedicated audience, and present onlooker 2024

"Theatreview provides a valuable industry platform for peer review and critical review of professional...performances in Aotearoa. ... I have consistently used Theatreview reviews to access pull-quotes to use...to promote performances ...[and] in Creative NZ funding applications to attest to the quality of the work, as many Theatreview reviewers are industry professionals and this provides an assurance of critical knowledge of the sector...

[The editorship] actively works with industry practitioners to build the pool of reviewers to expand Theatreview's writing base to include a more diverse range of perspectives. I find this particularly valuable, essential, for the quality reviewing of Māori and Pasifika ...work....

Theatreview .. continues to support writers in Aotearoa and develop new writers in partnership with the industry's needs - supporting the development of critical discourse around theatre and dance in Aotearoa."

Dolina Weihepeihana, Artistic Director Aotearoa New Zealand Festival of the Arts, 2024

"Theatreview is essential...as a marketing and publicity tool... More importantly, though, it is an important place for industry feedback that helps us and our commissioned artists evaluate individual works and the wider direction of the organisation. Frequently in regional centres (and, increasingly, in major centres) reviews by Theatreview writers form the only published external reviews for our touring seasons. Without Theatreview, reviewing in Aotearoa would be significantly diminished and even more poorly resourced.

With some of Footnote's seasons touring to more than ten centres, this permanent record of our activity is a valuable tool for ourselves but also, we believe, for others researching the company, the choreographers and other artists we commission, and our past works."

Anita Hunziker, Artistic Director Footnote New Zealand Dance, 2024

"The value of outlets such as Theatreview is multi-layered. At the core, having our work reviewed by writers who have a deep knowledge of the artform and can employ the lexicon, vernacular and language particular to it results in credible and erudite analysis which is vital to the evolution of an ongoing creative vision. Beyond the primary purpose of evaluation of our performance work from an objective perspective, companies such as ours are able to pull quotes from Theatreview's credible reviews which serve us in being able to add imprimatur to press and marketing collateral to be able to promote the work and Company for future seasons and presentations both locally and internationally, raising the profile of arts from Aotearoa and taking it to global stages...

It is imperative our unique stories continue to be told and Theatreview is critical in shining light on New Zealand performing artists and their work.

Theatreview is vital to the sector in NZ!."

JP Bolton, Creative Producer New Zealand Dance Company, 2024

“The Theatreview reviews are absolutely essential to Java Dance Theatre. We use the reviews and quotes from them to market our work to audiences and both national and international festival directors. As other media outlets have reduced or completely stopped reviewing Theatreview has become more and more important...”

Over the years we have practically used critical feedback from reviews to re-work and refine shows for touring. In Aotearoa there is a lack of healthy critical discourse in dance generally. Theatreview provides one of the few platforms that enables some critical analysis and discussion of work. Without this we all lose perspective. Critical discourse encourages artistic rigour and fuels the creation of high-quality dance, even when it is difficult.

Theatreview is an incredible resource. By creating an archive of reviews, Theatreview is archiving dance in Aotearoa in a way that is not happening in any other context.”

Sacha Copland, Artistic Director Java Dance Theatre, 2024

“Theatreview reviews...provide a professional service by way of critique which are insightful, and give context to our work within Aotearoa. We quote Theatreview reviews on our website, in media campaigns and funding applications...The breadth and history of Theatreview spans many years. Theatreview demonstrates the vibrant performing arts sector as cultural ambassadors for international markets, and their vital mahi is testament to this across all art the performing and related arts...”

This is a significant platform with international reach.”

Daniel Belton, Artistic Director Good Company Arts, 2024

“Theatreview provides an essential and highly valued space online where work is reviewed, documented and discussed. It gives a sense of formality, visibility and longevity to our work. Writing critically, intelligently or encouragingly about our live performance work in this country provides the audience with reference points and documentation of an artists (or shows) history, which is highly useful and valuable especially for artists touring work regionally. It also provides insight for the artist into how people are interpreting and seeing their work through the artform of writing.”

Malia Johnston, Artistic Director Movement of the Human, 2024

“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. 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.”

Siobhan Waterhouse, Royal New Zealand Ballet, 2024

... and earlier

“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

“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

"Theatre review...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."

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

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

David O'Donnell, Professor of Theatre, Te Herenga Waka/Victoria University of Wellington,

"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 Theatre review, 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

"Theatre review 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

"Theatre review ... provides a unique historical record, one not captured anywhere else ... Many of the places we have taken our shows Theatre review 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 Theatre review is an essential resource for reviews within New Zealand."

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