

SMILE SAY HALO – ME BELONG YOU – YOU BELONG ME

Daren Kamali and Tanya Muagututi'a

Here I am sitting in transit at the LA International Airport, busking on the wanderlust memories of the beautiful Solomon Islands that hosted this year's 11th Festival of Pacific Arts in Honiara.

What a memorable experience. The New Zealand delegation, 140 strong, arrived at Honiara International Airport on Monday 25 June at 2pm. We were warmly welcomed by the Minister of Culture and Tourism, Samuel Manetoali, and the local media. Lei and bead necklaces were placed over our heads, bags of gifts presented to each member of the New Zealand delegation, followed by food and entertainment before we hopped on our bus to the Panatina Campus, where we stayed for the duration of the festival.

Solomon hospitality was *tumas* (too much), as it is said in pidgin. The people are amazing – lots of happy faces, smiles, waves, shouts and a lot of appreciation for their visitors.

We were the second delegation to arrive on the island, after Nauru. I must say we were very well funded and looked after as a delegation at the festival this year. Creative New Zealand contributed \$500,000 in funding and selected a magnificent line-up of artists and operation staff, with much thanks to project manager Jon Tamahere and head of operations Muriwai Ihakara. We were truly blessed as a delegation compared to other islands at the festival – Cook Islands and Tonga had to pull out due to lack of funding.

We had our own cooks, kitchen people, doctors, nurses and even received per diem for the 21 days we were there. Amazing meals were provided daily, with an endless supply of clean water. Sanitisation was a priority. We had a zero tolerance policy for rubbish around the camp and grounds. A container was organised to ensure that all non-recyclable waste was returned to New Zealand, as there is a poor system of recycling in the Solomons.

It was great that we arrived a week before the festival, as it gave us time to acclimatise and get familiar with the sites where we were scheduled to perform and display our art.

We had to pack toiletries such as soap, shampoo, toothpaste, tooth brush, sunscreen, and fly and insect repellent. We could either hand-wash our clothes or



Figure 1. Te Matarae i o Rehu. Courtesy of Creative NZ Office.



Figure 2. Te Matarae i o Rehu. Courtesy of Creative NZ Office.

pay for laundry. It was compulsory to take a malarone tablet every morning after breakfast to avoid malaria from mosquito bites – malaria is common in the Solomon Islands.

Three blocks were allocated to the New Zealand delegation at Panatina Campus. Each block contained 12 rooms. There were three artists per room, with a mosquito net bubble, single mattress, a blanket and pillow each.

Block one accommodated our senior artists. Block two was allocated to the Te Matarae Kapahaka group (national kapahaka champions in 2011) and block three, aka 'The naughty block,' was our block. Block three is where everyone gathered almost every night to sing along to the collaboration sounds of Pacific Underground and 'Koile Band. Other artists on the block were the Nga Kaihanga Uku or Clay Artists Collective who worked on their pieces as music played late into the night. They encouraged others to try making their own pieces as well. Naughty Block also had Maori and Pacific Island actors, sculpture artists, weavers and painters. It was the coolest block. Hell, we even had visitors from the Solomons, Fiji and Rapa Nui delegations come to hang out and party with us.



Figure 3. Members of 'Koile and Pacific Underground practice outside their accommodation block. Photo: Tanya Muagututi'a.

New Zealand had a whare beside Fiji and Rapa Nui at the Panatina village. The blessing of our whare was held before dawn on the morning of 30 June. Performance artists including Atamira Dance, Daren Kamali, Jamie and Erena, Te Matarae Kapahaka group, James Webster and Jerome Cavenor (Maori puppetry), Pacific Underground and 'Koile were invited to perform on that morning. That night, musicians from the New Zealand delegation were invited to showcase an hour-long show at the King Solomon Hotel (aka King Sol), where most of our crew hung out during their free time, swimming and enjoying cocktails.

Sunday 2 July was New Zealand social night, held at the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel. It was a fun-filled evening hosted by the New Zealand delegation. Our special guests consisted of the Māori royal family led by Darrin Haimona, Mr Peter Sharples, the Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Gordon Darcy Lilo and our local Solomon guests. They were offered a delicious spread of hangi, complementary drinks and entertainment.

The next morning at dawn all the delegations gathered at AE Oval to celebrate the arrival of the eight double-hulled outrigger canoes that had navigated their way through the Pacific to be at the festival. Navigators from Cook Islands, Fiji, Tahiti, Samoa, Hawai'i, Aotearoa and two Pan-Pacific wakas were present. Delegations sang and danced with pride as the wakas entered the harbour. This event marked the start of the 11th Festival of Pacific Arts 2012 in the Solomon Islands.



Figure 4. Arrival of the Waka Ceremony – greeted by local canoes. Photo: Tanya Muagututi'a.



Figure 5. Pasifika Stage – local group.
Photo: Tanya Muagututi'a.



Figure 6. Islands Provinces group.
Photo: Tanya Muagututi'a.



Figure 7. Solomon Islands Provinces group.
Photo: Tanya Muagututi'a.



Figure 8. Solomon Islands Provinces group.
Photo: Tanya Muagututi'a.

The festival officially opened on the afternoon of Monday 3 July when all 27 delegations gathered behind the Honiara Council Building to begin the big march to the Lawson Tama Stadium where the Prime Minister, Gordon Darcy Lilo, and the nine provinces of the Solomon Islands – not forgetting the beautiful local children – welcomed us to their island nation. I must say, with a little giggle, that the New Zealand delegation looked very much like tourists marching and waving, without uniforms, holding umbrellas over their heads in the scorching heat.



Figure 9.



Figure 10. Aotearoa delegation Artists: James Rickard with help from Karaitiana Rurehe, and Anikaaro. Photo: Tanya Muagututi'a.



Figure 11. Aotearoa delegation Artist - Carla Ruka Photo: Tanya Muagututi'a.



Figure 12. Aotearoa Area - Dorothy Waetford from the collective Nga Kaihanga Uku demonstrates her clay process (image courtesy of Creative NZ Office).



Figure 13. Aotearoa area - Tongan visual artist Visesio Siasau talking with visitors about the meaning of his work at the front of the Aotearoa whare (image courtesy of Creative NZ Office).



Figure 14. "Hei Reo Aroha" starring Erina Daniels and Jamie McCaskill. Photo: Tanya Muagututi'a.



Figure 15. Pacific Underground and ' Koile perform at the Opening of the Art Exhibition. Photo: Tanya Muagututi'a.

The local people sang and danced throughout the afternoon into the night. At 8.30pm, a magical display of fireworks lit up the night-time sky to confirm the opening of the 11th Festival of Pacific Arts 2012 in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

Solomon people are the most generous and loving people. The local staff on campus were great – they helped as tour guides and security personnel, and beautiful mama helped in the kitchen. We were grateful to Gloria Phranyta Hong (marketing manageress at the Pacific Casino Hotel) – she showed us nothing but love. Gloria was generous to the New Zealand delegation, going out of her way to be our personal tour guide, picking us up in her Nissan Navara truck, taking us all over Honiara, to hotels, restaurants, clubs and beaches. She even introduced me to the manager at the Heritage Park Hotel (a five-star hotel) that led to a paid gig for our New Zealand bands. It was special when she invited the musicians to her place and hosted a birthday barbeque for our Queen Bee – Tanya Muagututi'a – on 7 July.

Gloria's sister, Queenie Chow, and Robert who owns the Coconut Cafe and Kava Bar, threw a farewell party for the New Zealand delegation on 11 July. They put a pig on the spit and complementary drinks on the bar for us. Other locals like Eric, Jaffa, Betrice, Ngaio, Ofati and Sue who owns the King Solomon Hotel were very friendly and hospitable.

It was all go from 4 July. The New Zealand delegation had an amazing line-up of artists, with high-quality performers, carvers, sculpture and tā moko artists, weavers, painters and clay-makers all displaying an outstanding body of work throughout the 12 days of the festival. They blew their audience away, receiving well-deserved reviews and compliments from national and international media and locals who filled up the arenas at all our shows.

Other delegations also exhibited amazing creative works and talent. They carried the torch for their island nations with pride and passion at venues like the Panatina Village, Doma, and the National Museum, Auditorium and National Art Gallery.

Performances that were scheduled for the Lawson Tama stage were rescheduled for the Pasifika Stage at Panatina as it was unfit to hold events due to poor staging.

Overall, the festival was a truly amazing experience and kept true to its theme of 'Culture in Harmony with Nature.' At the end of the festival, Pacific Underground (aka Pos Mavaega) and Tanya Muagututi'a wrote a song in tribute to the Solomon Islands and its people in collaboration with 'Koile and Daren Kamali, inspiring the title of this story: "Solomons Calling – Smile Say Halo – Me Belong You – You Belong Me."

The closing of the festival was an even bigger spectacle than the opening, again held at Lawson Tama Stadium. All the delegations marched through the streets into the stadium as in the opening, waving, singing, dancing and celebrating into the night. There was another overwhelming display of fireworks, bigger than the opening ceremony. Our last day brought an emotional and sad feeling to all of us at the New Zealand camp. It was hard to say good bye to the Solomons, but by the end of the three weeks most of us were ready to return to our families and to the comforts of our homes, with loving everlasting memories of the Solomon Islands.



Figure 16. Daren Kamali performs in collaboration with other delegates from Aotearoa Photo:Tanya Muagututi'a.

Our Time in the Sun

Touch down Solomoni
inhale hot air
Halo
staring gaze
smiley face
palm trees sway
gifts – leis
pan pipes and summer dreams
me fulla
dread lock
represent
naughty block
gnati coconut
weather hot
chew beetle nut
red smile
few Sol Brews
makes me feel so fine
me love Solomon
all of the time
strangers meet
Honiara streets
three weeks
non-stop
one drop
toads hop
ghekos crawl
up the wall
rain falls
29 degrees
cold showers
no time to sleep
happy hours
time flies
memories remain
Solomon Islands
I'll definitely
do this – all over again

Me love you tumas

Daren Kamali is a Pacific performance poet, author and youth worker. A co-founder of the the South Auckland Poets Collective and former member of the POLYNATION Poetry Collective (Queensland Poetry Festival 2008), Daren has performed in New Zealand, Australia, Fiji, Tahiti, Tonga, Rarotonga and Palau since 1999, with a vision to take Pacific poetry international. Of Fijian–Wallis and Futuna decent, he migrated to New Zealand in 1992. He is the current recipient of the 2012 Fulbright–Creative New Zealand Pacific Writers' Residency, at the University of Hawai'i. Last year he launched his first bilingual book/CD (in English and Fijian), entitled *Tales, Poems and Songs from the Underwater World*.

Tanya Muagututi'a has contributed to Christchurch performing arts collective Pacific Underground as a musician–songwriter and occasional actor since 1993. She also heads production duties and events for the group with husband Pos Mavaega, and has written and co-devised a number of plays. A recent stint as Pacific Artist in Residence at the University of Canterbury allowed Tanya to draft a new play and record Pacific Underground's CD *Island Summer*, which was launched in 2010. Songs from the CD featuring Tanya, Pos Mavaega, Andrew Sione, Hemi Lesatele, Chris Searle and Seta Timo were performed at FOPA, in collaboration with members of Dunedin band 'Koile. Also at FOPA, Pacific Underground collaborated with poet – musician Daren Kamali, taonga puoro artist Jerome Kavanagh and Maori songstress Toni Huata. Tanya recently moved with her family to Auckland following the Christchurch earthquakes. She enjoys taking photos and singing with her daughters Talia-Rae, Josephine and Ella.