

# A Pacific Island Story

By Sue Cheesman

Neil Ieremia, Artistic Director of Black Grace, has gone back to his Samoan roots for inspiration for this new full length work. 'Gathering Clouds' will premiere at the Civic in March 2009, as part of the Auckland Festival. Neil explains, "The spark for this work started with the idea of human zoos. German people who occupied Samoa took away a family to display in a zoo in Berlin as objects of curiosity. The whole idea of putting people on display has been disturbing me for a long time," "Embarking on a six month rehearsal period has allowed me time to revisit these ideas and to look at supporting material around this piece. Furthermore, I was also thinking about the Pacific Island (brown) experience in New Zealand - what we do to ourselves as a community and as people living in New Zealand."

The time has allowed Neil and some of the dancers to study a number of documents and issues including the Treaty of Waitangi, immigration statistics, documents on peace in the Pacific, the occupation of Samoa by the Germans, dawn raids in the 1960s and 70s, and youth gangs. During his research, Neil came across an article in the Dominion Post entitled 'Pacific Migrants Drain On The Economy', which focused on a paper by economist Dr Greg Clydesdale. "I have narrowed my work down to a response to this paper," he says with passion. However, he says, "I want to look at a more conciliatory work that offers some hope, rather than one that separates us even further. Like any other race living in this country we have our issues. There are some positives to be taken away from this - have a laugh at ourselves and a cry about some of the experiences, but ultimately learn from them and move on." With this work Neil says he wants to go back to telling stories through dance without film, huge sets or many props.

"I wanted to be as open as possible and not censor ideas; Listen to the work and explore a voice as far as it will take me without judging it."



'GATHERING CLOUDS' NEIL IEREMIA  
PHOTO: DUNCAN COLE

"I am an Elvis Presley fan and using his music in the section of work where I am talking about race relations in the dawn raids period, with songs like 'If I Could Dream' and 'Suspicious Minds' makes for a pretty interesting position." In complete contrast he is also using 'Goldberg Variations' by J.S. Bach.

He says, laughing, that the piece is very physical with a lot of aerial work in one section involving flying, rolling and tumbling through the air. "It will be a real humdinger."

In relation to working with the dancers he says "there are great dynamics in the room with this powerful mix of three male and three female dancers. They complement one another, are very good and I enjoy working with them - including their sideways looks at times."

"Collectively there is sadness, joy, toughness and vulnerability which comes out in their work. They are contributing a great deal to this work." Neil made it clear however that the dancer's research process informs their dancing but ultimately the movement material comes directly from him.

He says that the process of piecing all the fragments together has begun. "The 3am wake ups have already started and I am resigned to that happening till I finish the piece, however I am really excited about this work and it is still a privilege to be able to do this." +

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