

UPU

ON TOUR

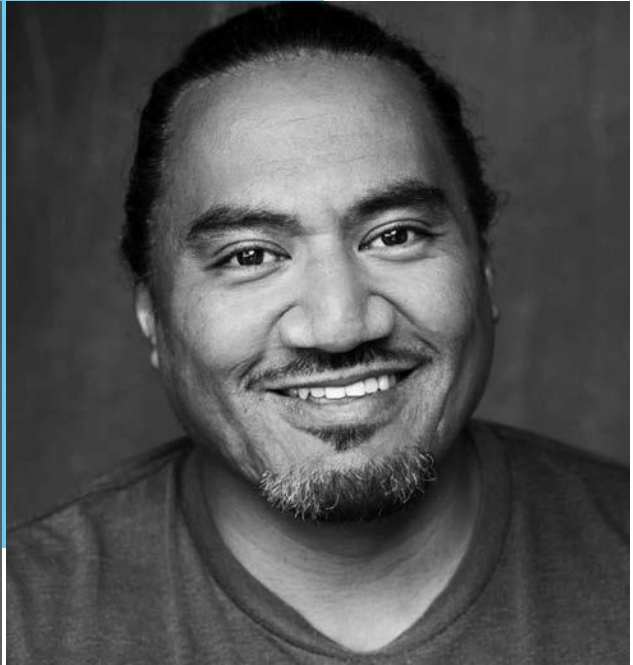


Produced by *UPU* Collective with support from Creative New Zealand.

 creative *nz*
ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND | TOA AOTEAROA

Photo Credit: Raymond Sagapolute

From the Creators



We, people of Oceania, are an ocean of storytellers. Historians, speakers of the now and prophets of the future. Our whakapapa/gafa/genealogies are passed down to us through oral storytelling, tatau and song. Much like our body of ocean, the wealth and depth of the literature in Oceania is vast.

UPU celebrates the gathering of the distinct voices from different islands in Oceania and also the connection between us by the largest body of ocean on earth.

So much rich poetry by so many great writers to fit into a one hour show. What you witness in *UPU* tonight is but a sneak peak into this incredible and growing collection of literature. It is our hope that you are inspired by what you witness in this show tonight and dive further into the poetry of poets you experience. Go to the library, ask other poets or google the name of a poet you were moved by tonight and feast upon their words.

Grace Iwashita-Taylor and Fasitua Amosa

“Theirs was a large world in which peoples and cultures moved and mingled unhindered by boundaries...”

— Epeli Hau’ofa in *Our Sea Of Islands*

UPU Collective would like to acknowledge people and spaces that have carved a platform for UPU to exist. Gabrielle Vincent, Basement Theatre, Jess Smith, Silo Theatre, Auckland Arts Festival, Mīri George, Hone Kouka and Kia Mau Festival, Fa’afetai tele lava for your support on the UPU malaga/journey.



On Tour in 2026

PHIVE Theatre, Parramatta, Sydney | Friday 28, Sat 29 Aug

Kindred People Festival, Monash University, Melbourne (Victorian Premiere) | Friday 4 Sep

Wyndham Cultural Centre, Wyndham, Melbourne | Saturday 5 Sep

Koānga Festival, Te Pou Theatre, Auckland | Sunday 20 Sep

For complete tour details visit: theupucollective.com

Ensemble

Maiava Nathaniel Lees, Fasitua Amosa, Nicola Kāwana, Mia Blake, Ana Corbett and Shadon Meredith

Creative

Artistic Director, Co-Creator: Fasitua Amosa

Producer: Ana Corbett

Set Design: Michael McCabe

Production Manager, Sound Engineer: Emily Hakaraia

Movement & Choreography: Joash Fahitua

Soundscape Design, Original Composition: Faiumu Matthew Salapu

Artist & Cultural Design Elements (Mamanu Design): Tyla Vaeau

Curator, Co-Creator: Grace Iwashita-Taylor

Lighting, Projection Design: Rowan Pierce

Costume Design: Kristin Seth

LX & AV Supervisor&Tech Op: Jane Hakaraia

Stage Manager: Eliza Josephson-Rutter

Poems

No One is an Island - For Georgie (excerpt)
– Teresia Teaiwa

A Samoan Star Chant For Matariki
– Selina Tusitala Marsh

Pō
– Brandy Nālani McDougall

Inside Us The Dead: Polynesians
– Mauaiaivao Albert Wendt

How I Got My Name
– Briar Grace-Smith

Moko
– Ben Brown

Warrior Wig And Boar Tusk Pendant
– Daren Kamali

On Cooking Captain Cook
– Brandy Nālani McDougall

Spam's Carbon Footprint
– Craig Santos Perez

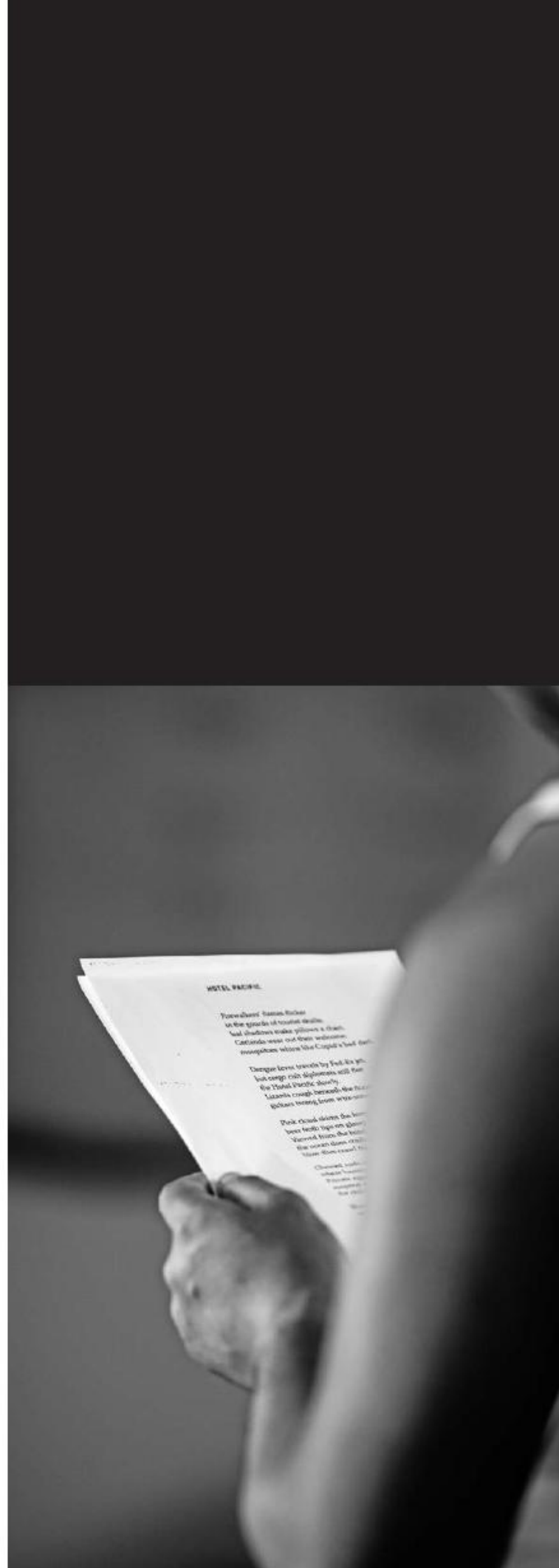
SONGS OF THE FAT BROWN WOMAN
– Sia Figiel

This Is A Photo Of My House
– Tusiata Avia

Inside Us The Dead: Missionaries
– Mauaiaivao Albert Wendt

Vatu Invocation
– Grace Mera Molisa

15 (excerpt from 'Thirty Songs of Love and Life by the Nineteenth-Century Poet Tomai, of Liku' in The Shark That Ate the Sun)
– John Pule



For Makalesi Taulepa: Fine mei Ofu
– Karlo Mila

16 (excerpt from 'Thirty Songs of Love and Life by the Nineteenth-Century Poet Tomai, of Liku' in The Shark That Ate the Sun)
– John Pule

I am the Māori Jesus
– Ben Brown

Cross
– Albert Leomala

Natives Wanted
– Brandy Nālani McDougall

Girl From Tuvalu
– Selina Tusitala Marsh

Tell Them
– Kathy Jetnīl-Kijiner

Basket
– No'u Revilla

White Land
– Celestine Kulagoe

Letter To The Colonel
– Konai Helu Thaman

Two Nudes On A Tahitian Beach
– Selina Tusitala Marsh

When A Pakeha Tells A Māori Joke
– Hone Tuwhare

Daddy Said
– Tafea Polamalu

Tropical
– Lyz Soto

Virgin Loi
– Karlo Mila

Paradise Pasifika
– Leilani Tam

How do I De.Kolo-Nize Myself
– Daren Kamali

Lapita Pot
– Apirana Taylor

No One is an Island - For Georgie (excerpt)
– Teresia Teaiwa

The writers whose poems feature in *UPU* have donated their writer's royalty share to the Teresia Teaiwa Memorial Scholarship in Pacific Studies fund. A fund that enables Pasifika students to access and excel at tertiary learning. Teresia Teaiwa (1968 – 2017), whose poem, *No One is an Island - For Georgie*, features in *UPU*, was the director of Va'aomanū Pasifika at Victoria University of Wellington, a renowned scholar, activist and poet. Teresia is internationally celebrated for her groundbreaking work in Pacific Studies. If you would also like to donate to this fund please contact the Scholarships Office at Victoria University, scholarships-office@vuw.ac.nz.
Fa'afetai tele lava.

UPU honours the featured works of these poets who have departed our physical world, for their pioneering and significant contributions to literature in Oceania. They still live among us.
Grace Mera Molisa
Teresia Teaiwa
Hone Tuwhare

Their voices and words a sacred, living and breathing taonga.

UPU: A Celebration of Trailblazing Moana Writers

Sāmoan/Pākehā writer Faith Wilson reflects on the words and the histories behind *UPU*.

This essay was commissioned by The Pantograph Punch in partnership with Silo Theatre, who covered the cost of production.

The article first originated in Silo's show programme as well as on pantograph-punch.com



The feet of the fat
brown woman / Are
grounded nicely to the
bellies of / Her mamas /
The fat blue Pacific /
The fat brown Earth /
Thank you very much

— Sia Figiel, *Songs of the fat brown woman*

I have a strong visceral reaction when I read or hear poetry by my fellow writers of the Moana. I legit get chills up my spine. My hairs stand on end. I get butterflies in my stomach. My eyes well up and I cry. Even when the poem is meant to be funny. One of the reasons for this, I think, is that I feel a surge of excitement, butterflies, chills, which is followed by a feeling of guilt, more butterflies, crying. Excitement because the poetry is that hot, and guilt because of all the different authors I encounter, I have actually only properly read from like, five of them. As someone who kinda prides themselves on being well read, why haven't I read more poetry from my Moana bros and sisters? *UPU* is not so much a play as it is a celebration of words. It is an ode to a generation of trailblazing



writers, those who make up our canon of published Moana writers, who were the first of us to talk about the effects of colonisation, who questioned the ideas of the noble savage and the dusky maiden. They're who I should be thanking every day for the fact that I get to write about stuff other than that.

The script for *UPU* is essentially a collection of poems, curated by or 'fished for' by poet and performer Grace Taylor. When Grace told me that *UPU* is informed by two essays, Epeli Hau'ofa's *The Ocean in Us* and matua Mauaiva Albert Wendt's *Towards a New Oceania*, my guilt crept in again and I felt like a bad Sāmoan. I had not read either of these essays and praised the gods when I found both were available online for me to read for free.

Each of these essays, in its own way, makes a central argument: that for our peoples and our lands and our ocean to thrive, Oceania (Moana is the term I lean toward these days and will use here) must unite.

Mauaiva Albert considers artistic diversity to be the Moana's greatest asset. Through the different cultures within the Moana, our artistic contributions (dance, visual arts, the words) weave firm links between us. "This artistic renaissance is enriching our cultures further, reinforcing our identities/self-respect/and pride, and taking us through a genuine decolonisation; it is also acting as a unifying force in our region," writes Wendt.

UPU lives and breathes this kaupapa. Grace says, when selecting the various poems in *UPU*, she tried very hard to find published poems from every region of the Moana. Some Islands were difficult to source from – she says that this just shows how much opportunity there is to publish more poetry from those less represented regions.

Before my kōrero with Grace, I had noticed that the authors whose work is featured in the show are all from a certain era of writing, those who I call the first and second generation of Moana writers: Selina Tusitala-Marsh, Karlo Mila, Sia Figiel, David Eggleton, to name a few. I also noticed there were only a couple of writers from the emerging generation – the poets that I am currently most interested in reading (being a millennial and all). I questioned this, as I thought a performance concerned with unifying the Moana should not just be about regional unification, but also about connecting the young with the old, the established with the emerging.

But after hearing more from Grace, and actually reading and re-reading many of the selected poems, I was shook. Not only are so many of these poems written with a scary prescience that I can attribute only to the weird other-worldliness that many Moana artists seem to live with, but I also realised that bringing these poems to our rangatahi is connecting the past with the present, and with the future.

As Grace says:

"A main part of our kaupapa is to inspire people to dive into Pacific literature, to libraries – by bringing the published word to the stage through the oral word... there is so much richness of published poetry from Oceania – but unless you are at uni or in an academic environment you probably will not access it... many audience members over our last two seasons said, 'We just didn't know this poetry existed.'"

As Grace points out, the poetry of many emerging writers is available online. That's less true of the first and second generation of Moana writers who feature in *UPU*. Much of their poetry is published in books that so few of our people know about. In those books, you'll find a wealth of writing that's as relevant now as the day it was written. *UPU* bridges that accessibility gap.

Two of the most salient issues concerning the Moana currently are undoing the effects of colonisation and, of course, climate change. Epeli's essay talks at length about the environmental concerns that have plagued the Moana and continue to do so, especially the smaller nations. For Epeli, the unification of Moana is essential if we are to protect our environment; through working together, we find our strength. Meanwhile Mauaiaivao Albert posits the idea of a "colonial chill"; the creepy aftermath of colonisation, the way it has seeped into our bones. Even though Mauaiaivao Albert's essay was written in the 70s, and Epeli's in the 90s, and many of these poems were written in the 80s, 90s and early 2000s, they speak to those two exact issues with currency and urgency.

In the space of a few hours after my exchange with Grace, I'm once again embarrassed at my lack of knowledge of writing that has been published and produced by writers I've always been meaning to read but haven't. I feel like a *fia poko*, coming into this thinking that the only solutions to these issues can come from our present. When, in fact, as Mauaiaivao Albert puts it, "We must rediscover and reaffirm our faith in the vitality of our past, our cultures, our dead, so that we may develop our own unique eyes, voices, muscles, and imagination."

UPU is all about bringing these writers to the fore. To make their writing accessible to everyone – even a bots like me. And I think



of Mauaiaivao Albert saying that literature of the Moana transcends barriers, that writing is revolutionary, and my own shame of not knowing these things is one hundred percent a symptom of that colonial chill.

Epeli Hau'ofa's essay begins with the late Teresia Teaiwa's famously quoted phrase "We cry and sweat salt water / so we know that the ocean is really in our blood." I know this phrase well, as many Moana poets do. As I was reading some of the poems included in *UPU*, feeling my body physically react to the works, Teresia and Epeli's words kept floating in my brain.

Maybe the physical reaction I have is not only one of guilt, after all. Maybe it's because I too am from the sea. The Pacific waters that flow through my blood flow through all of the writers I have read or am only just beginning to read. I feel so physically connected to their words because their words are in part mine. My history is my own, but it is also theirs. And though the ocean is vast, it is the single thing that brings us together. As Epeli says, "the sea is our pathway to each other and to everyone else, the sea is our endless saga, the sea is our most powerful metaphor, the ocean is in us." If *UPU* is about connection and unification, even as I write this from the other side of the world I taste those salty tears, and feel at home.

Faith Wilson

UPU Collective

UPU Collective was founded by Ana, Fasitua & Grace in 2020 after the premiere season of UPU with Silo Theatre at Auckland Arts Festival.



UPU
COLLECTIVE

UPU Collective is a Pacific-led performing arts collective creating contemporary, Pacific-centred work for stage and screen. We are committed to making bold, culturally grounded work that centres critical Tagata Moana voices and engages deeply with the world around us.

Alongside creating and touring work, we are working to build pathways and opportunities for Pacific artists through development, collaboration and cultural exchange-strengthening connections between creatives, communities and organisations across Aotearoa, Australia and internationally, and creating more space for our artists and stories to grow, challenge, connect and be seen.

As part of the Collective's next chapter of new work, UPU Collective has secured stage adaptation rights to **Epeli Hau'ofa's *Tales of the Tikongs***, which is currently in development for the stage.



Ana Corbett

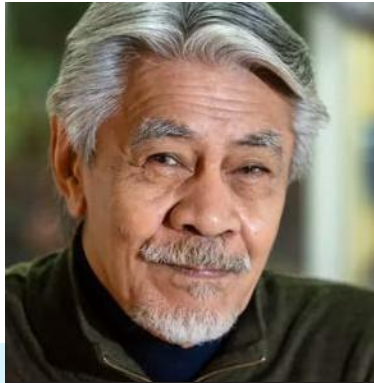


Grace Iwashita-Taylor



Fasitua Amosa

Ensemble



Maia Nathaniel Lees



Nicola Kāwana



Mia Blake

MAIAVA NATHANIEL LEES is a New Zealand theatre actor and director and film actor of Samoan descent, best known for film roles in *The Matrix Reloaded*, *The Matrix Revolutions* and *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* and for starring in *Young Hercules* as Chiron the centaur. He appeared in *30 Days of Night* with Josh Hartnett. He also played Master Mao in the *Power Rangers* series *Power Rangers Jungle Fury*. Early television appearances in New Zealand included a regular role in the 1989 series *Shark in the Park*. He is also well known for a long career in theatre, having received many prestigious rewards for his contribution to the arts. Lees was one of the influential actors that paved the way for Pacific theatre in New Zealand. In 2004 he was awarded the Senior Pacific Artist Award at the Creative New Zealand Arts Pasifika Awards.

NICOLA KĀWANA (Ngāruahine, Ngāti Ruanui, Ngāti Kahungunu o Wairarapa) stands among Aotearoa's most talented and successful actors. Trained with the Taranaki Youth Theatre and a graduate of Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School, Nicola's career spans across theatre, television, and film. While many still recognise her from prominent roles in *Shortland Street* and *Jackson's Wharf*, Nicola's screen work is extensive, and her versatility shines across genres. From starring alongside Martin Clunes in *The Man Who Lost His Head* and playing opposite Temuera Morrison in *Fresh Meat*; to the comedic adventure of Netflix's *The*

New Legends of Monkey and the drama of *One Lane Bridge*, she continues to showcase her range. As a sought after stage presence, she performs regularly with New Zealand's most prominent theatre companies. Highlights include Auckland Theatre Company's *North by Northwest* and *Rendered*, Silo Theatre's *White Rabbit Red Rabbit*, and the internationally toured *UPU*, which recently captivated audiences in Montreal.

Beyond acting, Nicola has showcased her passion for horticulture as the host of *Whānau Living* and *Get Growing*; these roles blending storytelling with her commitment to sustainable gardening practices. Her recent foray into playwriting with *Kūpapa* adds another layer to her impressive creative repertoire.

MIA BLAKE is a highly accomplished Tongan–New Zealand actress renowned for her extensive body of work across film, screen, and theatre. Notably, she garnered multiple awards for her outstanding performance in the lead role of Director Toa Fraser's acclaimed feature *No.2* and the short film *This is Her*. Her diverse film credits include *The Tattooist*, *6 Days* and *Stray*. In her latest television venture, she graced the screen in TVNZ's series *After the Party* alongside Robyn Malcolm and Peter Mullan, following previous appearances in *One Lane Bridge* and *Shortland Street*. Mia's theatrical contributions are equally remarkable, featuring lead roles in productions for The Silo Theatre, including *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Angels in America*, *White Rabbit*, *Red Rabbit* and most recently *Upu Mai Whetu*.

Ensemble



Ana Corbett



Shadon Meredith



Fasitua Amosa

ANA CORBETT (Aotearoa, Kolovai – Tonga, Lakeba – Fiji, Sapapali'i – Samoa) is an actor, voice artist and producer based in Naarm/Melbourne. Her recent screen credits include *Who Needs Love Songs*, *Shortland Street*, playing high-powered defence lawyer Ava Shaw, and the acclaimed Australian series *Totally, Completely Fine*. Her theatre credits include Auckland Theatre Company's *O le Pepelo*, *le Gaoi*, *ma le Pala'ai*, and performing with UPU across Aotearoa, Australia, Canada and internationally. Ana is also a highly experienced voice-over artist and a former top-ranked tennis player in Aotearoa New Zealand. She is a producer and co-founder of UPU COLLECTIVE, the team behind the award-winning theatre production UPU, and is currently developing new theatre and screen projects across Aotearoa and Australia. Ana is a proud graduate of Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School.

SHADON MEREDITH is a dynamic NZ-born Sāmoan actor with a commanding presence on stage and screen. A Toi Whakaari graduate, he has built an impressive career performing locally and internationally. His theatre work includes *King Lear* and *The Seagull* (Auckland Theatre Company), UPU (*Silo Theatre*, toured to Mexico City and Montreal), and multiple productions with Red Leap Theatre, including the upcoming *Wrest* (May 2025).

He created and performed *Waiting*, an award-winning solo devised work under his company, SOS + SHA Creative. On screen, Shadon starred as Andy in *Rūrangi* (Season 2) and appeared in *Shortland Street*, *My Life is Murder* (Season 3), and *Double Parked*. He was a presenter and writer for Seasons 1–3 of TVNZ's *Toi Time*. His film credits include *Shut Eye*, *Darkest Light*, and *The Paragon*, which premiered at major international festivals before gaining a cult following after its U.S. release in 2024, earning recognition from *The New York Times*. Spanning theatre, television, and film, Shadon's work continues to captivate audiences.

FASITUA AMOSA is a seasoned NZ-Samoan actor known for his versatility. He has just wrapped up on the TV Drama series *A Remarkable Place to Die*. He starred in all three seasons of the US NBC series *Young Rock* and appeared in Netflix's *The New Legend of Monkey*. His other notable TV credits include *The Gulf*, *Fresh Eggs*, *Harry* and *Shortland Street*. On stage, he has performed in productions by Auckland Theatre Company and *Silo*, with roles in *King Lear*, *The Seagull*, *Rendered*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Creative

MICHAEL MCCABE

Set Designer

Michael has made a lasting impression on the theatre scene in Tāmaki Makaurau in the past few years, winning the Best Newcomer Award in 2018. But that's only the beginning – his impressive portfolio includes Silo's own The Blind Date Project and other theatre projects including Orientation, Jacinda, Work Do and 8 Reasonable Demands. He was also awarded a Gold Pin at the 2018 Best Design awards for his work for The Claw for Satellites.

ROWAN PIERCE

Light and Projection Design

Rowan is an artist working in a wide range of mediums including theatre, film, music, live performance, video and installation. A few of the celebrated works he has collaborated on include Movement of the Human, RUSHES, Pōhutu and Lumina.

'ANONYMOUZ', AKA FAIUMU MATTHEW SALAPU

Soundscape Design / Original Composition

Anonymouz experience in the creative industries spans 15 years, and his talents were recognised when he won the 2016 Creative New Zealand Emerging Pacific Artist Award.

KRISTIN SETH

Costume Design

Her creative eye in Costume Design has brought together garments and handmade pieces for UPU from various artists in Aotearoa, including Jarcinda Stowers-Ama, Dena Jacob, Shona Tawhiao, Lisa Kau, Pati Solomona Tyrell, Numa Mackenzie and Brother Jay. Kristin's work traverses film, television and theatre, her previous Costume Design credits with Silo include Medea, Hir and The Blind Date Project.

TYLA VAEAU

Artist / Projection Mamanu Design

Design Tyla is an artist and tatau practitioner of Samoan (Sale'a'aumua, Aleipata and Safune, Savai'i) and Pakeha descent. Tyla has a longstanding passion for all forms of Pacific art, graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Elam School of Fine Arts in 2009 and a BA Honours in Art History in 2011. Her ongoing passion for art and culture was met by a calling from her family and community to take up tatau.

JOASH FAHITUA

Movement / Choreographer

His history of performance includes study at P.I.P.A (Pacific Institute of Performing Arts), dancing for Black Grace and his own choreography including the work 'Muamua' performed at the Pacific Dance Festival, Tempo Festival and Pacific Choreolab.



The UPU Collection



Since UPU first took the stage, we have been continually moved by how often our audience has expressed a deep desire to hold onto the words that resonated with them - to revisit the poems, reflect on their meanings, and continue the journey beyond the performance.

This frequent and heartfelt request has inspired us to offer The UPU Collection - a beautifully designed keepsake that captures the essence of the show, allowing you to take this experience home.



Scan the code for more information

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More than a souvenir, this book serves as a bridge - connecting audiences to the wider bodies of work by the poets whose voices shape UPU. Alongside the performance text, this publication also includes details of the poets' original works and the collections in which their poems were first published, offering you the opportunity to explore and engage further.

The UPU Collection is available for purchase post-show or via our website, with all proceeds going directly back into the UPU fund to support our continued international touring. We extend our deepest gratitude to all the poets and their families for supporting this UPU publication. Your generosity and trust allow us to continue sharing these powerful voices with audiences around the world. To learn more about how you can support UPU, visit theupucollective.com

Thank you for being part of this journey. Your support keeps UPU moving.

RIVERSIDE LIVE@PHIVE

28 – 29 AUGUST 2026



UPU
COLLECTIVE

Photo credit: Andi Crown



Performing Arts
Network New Zealand