

WRITTEN BY **OSCAR KIGHTLEY & DAVE ARMSTRONG** DIRECTED BY **DANIEL PENGELLY**

WARNING:
CONTAINS
NAUGHTY
BITS



6 JUNE - 4 JULY

NIUSILA

AN HILARIOUS LOOK AT AN UNLIKELY FRIENDSHIP

Education Pack

PRINCIPAL SPONSOR



SEASON SPONSOR



meridian

CORE FUNDER



SHOW SPONSOR



BY ARRANGEMENT WITH



**THE
forge**
AT THE COURT

CONTENTS

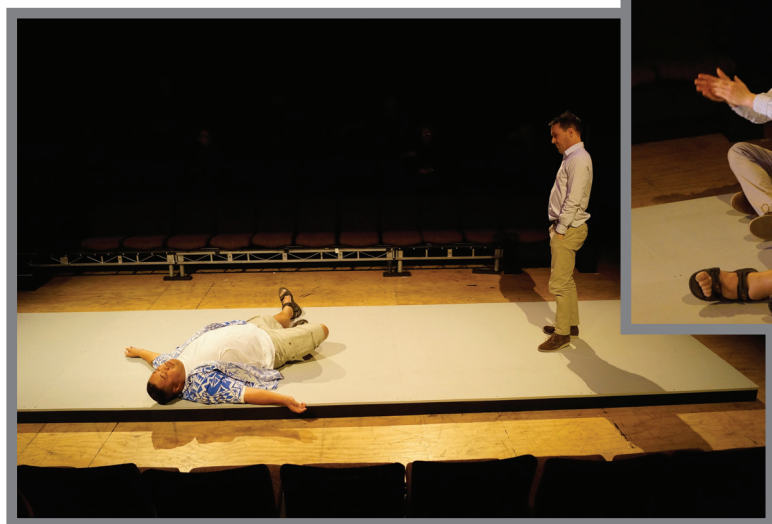
About the Play	3
Synopsis	4
Reflecting on the Play	5
Writing the Play	6
Playing Traverse	8
Two Actors, Many Roles	10
Interview with the Director	12
Interview with the Set Designer and Lighting Designer	13
Interview with the Actors	14
Pacifica Theatre	15

ABOUT THE PLAY

The award-winning Niu Sila premiered at Downstage Theatre, Wellington, in 2003 and has since played all over New Zealand and internationally. Auckland Theatre Company first staged Niu Sila in 2005 with Damon Andrews and Dave Fane, directed by Conrad Newport. The central device of Niu Sila is that two actors play an array of multi-cultural characters. Events in Niu Sila occur over a period of time from the late 1960's to the early 2000's and the characters move in and out of a wide variety of locations. Ioane and Peter attend school at a time before NCEA (when School Certificate was the first secondary school qualification)

and when the intermediate to high school year levels started at Form One (Year 7) and finished in 7th Form (Year 13). Niu Sila is a unique New Zealand play and an excellent example of Pasifika Theatre, with its mix of English and Samoan language, contemporary slang, spoofing of stereotypes and physical theatre. The play touches on issues of racism, cross-cultural friendships, the importance of family, and makes allusions to the Dawn Raids of the 1980s.

Reprinted with permission from the Auckland Theatre Company Niu Sila Education Pack, 2013.
Writer: Louise Tu'u. Editor: Lynne Cardy



SYNOPSIS

In a suburban TAB, two childhood friends meet up again as adult strangers. Thirty years before hand, during the peak of Polynesian immigration to Auckland, six year old Ioane Tafioka, recent immigrant from the island of Atua, knocks on the door of local boy, Peter Burton. Ioane has decided that Peter is his friend and he wins him over through sharing his aspirations of owning a TV, the merits of an umu over a hangi and by admonishing him to never talk back to his parents. Spanning three decades Peter narrates the energetic and ultimately moving tale of their shared experiences; at school, at church, playing cricket, fishing for eels, going to the orchestra, and eventually dealing with the police and the justice system. As the boys grow into young

men events and attitudes unfold to force their friendship to end. Supported throughout by unforgettable characters from a cross section of New Zealand society: Frank Burton, Peter's father, an extreme leftwing, Bartok-loving social crusader, the deceptively ill-dressed minister who is affectionately known as 'Criminal' and Mrs Tafioka, whose formidable role as a nonsense matriarch is matched only by her unconditional love for both her 'sons'. The play ends as it begins, back in the TAB where Peter and Ioane are briefly reunited and there is an abrupt twist to the story when Peter learns the poignant truth about the fate of his old friend, who has recently returned to Atua.

Reprinted with permission from the Auckland Theatre Company [Niu Sila](#) Education Pack, 2013.
Writer: Louise Tu'u. Editor: Lynne Cardy



on the REFLECTING PLAY

**'A BEAUTIFUL STORY ABOUT FRIENDSHIP,
TOLD IN A LIGHT HEARTED WAY'**

(Dan Pengelly, Director - Niu Silla)

Themes

- Friendship
- Racism
- Prejudice
- Family Violence
- Power of naivete

What others can you think of?

ACTION: Still Images – working in groups, each group is given a word from the list below, without the rest of the class knowing their word. Groups work to create a still image, a picture from their bodies, that they feel communicates the word they have been given.

Share each image one at a time with the class and discuss what word they think is being communicated by the image (this will bring up loads of connected words and ideas) and debate what these ideas or themes have to do with the play Niu Sila.

- Judgement
- Prejudice
- Friendship
- Trust
- Violence
- Family
- Innocence



DISCUSSION: This play addresses some serious and very real issues, how effective was a comedic approach in communicating these issues to the audience? Why did this work/not work?

DISCUSSION: Choice or Chance! Debate which of the characters' life pathways are taken through choice and which through chance.

ACTION: Hot seating – in groups or as a whole class choose someone to play Ioane or Peter at a specific age. Ask them to try and answer questions from the group in character. Explore the changing opinions or perspective from each character at a variety of ages, make sure you refer back to the different themes or ideas in the play. What did this exercise tell you about the characters?

the WRITING PLAY

- AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVE ARMSTRONG AND OSCAR KIGHTLEY

Niu Sila is written by two well-known New Zealand playwrights, Oscar Kightley and Dave Armstrong. Oscar and Dave share their creative processes when writing alone or in collaboration.

What got you into writing, specifically the art of playwrighting?

Dave: I've always loved plays. Initially I was a musician but ended up writing bits of shows I played the trumpet in.

Oscar: I enjoyed performing and visualising a well-written scene in my head. Being the writer of plays, you get to see it as an audience member and relive the moment of creation.

What inspired you both to write a play that spanned over three decades?

Dave: Most of Niu Sila was written about seven years ago. Oscar and I were in our thirties (well I was anyway, Os was late twenties) when we wrote the story. Lots of Niu Sila is biographical so I guess if we left it till we were seventy we would have written a play spanning seven decades.

Oscar: It was the obvious form, really. Stylistically, the changes are easier to facilitate in a play (and cheaper) than say, a TV series or a film. As far as the thrust of the story is concerned, it's easier to be a mate with someone when you're five than when you're twenty-five.



What was it like to work on an intimate project, such as a play?

Dave: It was real fun. Working with Os (and also the Nakeds³ I've later discovered) is different from working with other writers. 'The work' as in the play, sits on the computer and you have a turn at writing it, maybe talking to your co-writer, maybe not. Then you go and eat or go for a walk and happily let the other guy write a scene. Dare I say it's more of a relaxed 'Polynesian' style of writing than two uptight palagis arguing over every syllable.

Oscar: It was cool, I mean it, the best thing in the world. What really excites me about a play is the immediacy.

What inspires you to write?

Oscar: I guess the joy of telling a story and the joy of hearing one told. It's such an unbelievable feeling. Stories are great.

Dave: Real life.

³The Naked Samoans, a prominent comedy group who premiered with their now legendary show Naked Samoans talk about their knives, as part of the 1998 Laugh! Festival. Original cast members were Dave Fane, Oscar Kightley, Shimpal Lelisi and Mario Gaoa, now celebrated as the co-creators of hit animated TV show Bro'town.

Reprinted with permission from the Auckland Theatre Company *Niu Sila* Education Pack, 2013.

Writer: Louise Tu'u. Editor: Lynne Cardy

ACTION: Have a go at writing a script that uses a flashback format (like in *Niu Sila*) to tell the story of meeting your best friend at Primary School. Choose one of the characters to play the narrator character (Peter in *Niu Sila*).

Ext: Rehearse these short plays and perform for the class.

PLAYING TRAVERSE

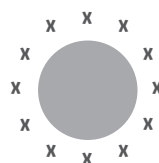
DIFFERENT WAYS OF STAGING A SHOW

There are many different ways of choosing to arrange an audience for a play. In the studio space at The Court Theatre we have the flexibility to use any of these options. Unlike in our main stage space, the studio is set up uniquely for each play so any option can be explored.

Traverse - where the audience is on both sides of the action, it is very difficult to have any scenery in this set up.



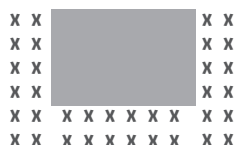
In the round - where the audience sit all the way around the playing space



End on - Where the audience sits at one of the performance space



Thrust - where the audience sit on three sides of the playing space.



DISCUSSION: The director and set designer made a choice with The Court Theatre's production to stage the play in traverse. How effective do you think this choice was and why?

ACTION: Have a go at staging this extract of the play in traverse. What are the considerations you have to make?

PETER: Where's your lunch?

IOANE: I buy my lunch today, my mother give me a dollar.

PETER: Does your mother give you a dollar every day?

IOANE: Only when she win the race. If she loses, she give me a whack.

PETER: I got 50 cents when I helped Billy Walker do his paper run.

IOANE: You buy lollies?

PETER: My parents made me bank it in my Post Office account

IOANE: Mum says next time she wins the double at Ellerslie, she buys a TV.

PETER: Even Michael Taylor doesn't have a TV!

IOANE: You must have one?

PETER: No way

IOANE: But you rich.

PETER: Dad doesn't like the noise

IOANE: But that's why you buy a TV, stupid, to watch the picture and listen to the noise!

PETER: Not my dad.

IOANE: My father love the TV. He say it's the best thing about living in Niu Sila.

PETER: Dad says books and the radio are better for us.

IOANE: Then your dad bloody stupid. (They laugh) My uncle got a TV. We go to his place on Friday night to watch the Wacky Races and a cowboy movie. You see the Wacky Races?

PETER: Yeah, it's cool.

IOANE: Race you to the dairy.

PETER: Ok, I'm Dick Dastardly and you're the Cavemen.

IOANE: No no no. I'm Ant Hill Mob and you're Penelope Pittstop. No, you're Peter Pittstop.

TWO ACTORS,

MANY ROLES

How do you ensure the story and characters are clear to the audience when you play so many different characters?

Greg: Each character needs to have a distinctive voice and an instantly recognisable physicality so even before the character has spoken the audience understand who it is. For example Semu's 'Mum' character is always waving a fan, so as soon as he starts doing that the audience are aware of who has appeared and often that's enough to make them laugh. The character of Peter does all the story-telling outside of the scenes, so for me it's a matter of making sure I'm clearly communicating the events that unfolded, but also making it seem like these are Peter's memories rather than just anecdotal recollections.

Semu: You have to know your characters' physicality - how they walk, stand, react physically. Then decide how they sound - nasal, chest voice etc. and play with that. Then invest in your characters' relationships with others in the play.

What advice would you give to students approaching performing in a piece that requires them to take on more than one character in quick succession?

Greg: Start big. At the beginning of rehearsals create characters that are vocally and physically very OTT, almost caricatures rather than real people. Have fun with them. Don't be afraid to go too far with the characters because this is a great way to find a vocal and physical 'hook' that will allow you to lock the character down really quickly. Once you've found those character hooks or anchors, you can reduce the characters down to a more believable size. The physical hooks especially are essential for quick changes. For the 'cop' I fold my arms and chew gum, for Miss Hagan, I'm slightly bent, with my right hand on my lower back and my left hand like a claw... very witchy. Often just putting your body into the shape will lead the voice to appear without consciously thinking about it.

Semu: Fully commit yourself to the role/roles. If you fail, failure is good. It's how you come back from that failure that counts. Leave no room for doubt, find the life and playfulness within each character.



ACTION:

1. Finding characters physically – with the whole class walking around the space experiment with leading from different parts of the body. Try leading with your feet, your knees, your hips, your chest and finally your head. Take a moment to watch other peoples' interpretation of leading with different parts of their body, people will approach each body part differently.

2. Each person chooses one physicality that they enjoyed in the first exercise. Walking around the space explore what happens when you start exaggerating these physical traits. Imagine that you are starting at level one, try and exaggerate your movements slowly from level one to ten.

Choose a level to continue to work with, level five usually feels about right.

3. Find a partner, in a pair help each other decide who each other's character is, what they sound like and who they are...

4. Devise a short scene, no longer than 1 minute, between the two characters. Rehearse the scene so you know the movement, dialogue and action.

5. Have a go at playing this as one actor playing both parts. Can you use the physicality of your partner to help you show clearly that you are playing two different characters? Swap over so each person has had a go at watching and at playing two parts at once.

THE COURT THEATRE

PRODUCTION

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR - DANIEL PENGELLY



Why did you want to direct Niu Sila?

At its heart, Niu Sila is a bromance. A story of friends who grow up in two different cultures and end up in very different places and yet they are both great guys at heart. It makes me appreciate how I have been raised and realise the diversity of cultures, behaviours and resources each of us grows up within. These themes and ideas are worth provoking in our community. Niu Sila is a cheeky and heart-warming story worth telling.

On a technical front the biggest challenge for the actors and directors of this piece is there are only two people on stage to bring over 20 characters to life. No props with simple set and costumes... it is an actor's piece that relies on their hard work and skill to succeed. This is a challenge and gift to play with.

What key words would you use to describe your creative vision for the production?

Live, Cheeky, Heartfelt

What do you want the audience to think about after watching this production of Niu Sila?

What advantages and disadvantages did your upbringing offer?

Are you making the most of your opportunities or being repressed by your disadvantages?

Can you be more active in engaging with other cultures in New Zealand?

How much of the story did your imagination add to?

DISCUSSION: What do you think the most important message in the story is? If you were directing a production of Niu Sila describe one way you make sure that message was clear to the audience?

INTERVIEW WITH THE SET DESIGNER - NIGEL KERR

SETTING THE SCENE

When designing a set for a play what are the steps that you usually take?

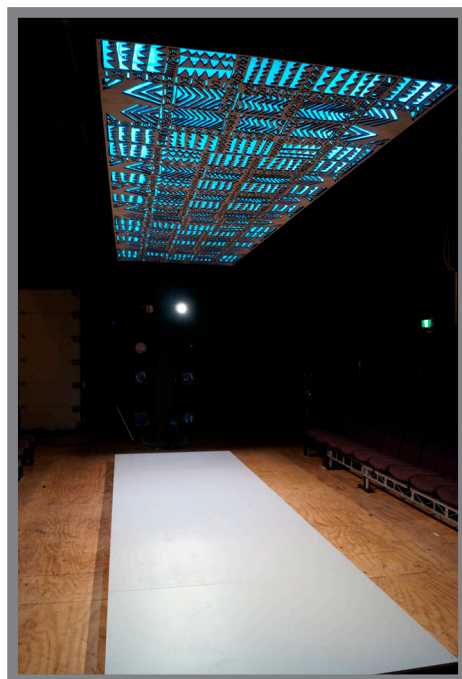
I start by reading the script and talking to the director. The first meeting I have is with the director, costume designer, sound designer and lighting designer, we all talk together and discuss the show. We discuss its flavour and character. From that meeting we will have an idea of what we want to do with the show. I will present my ideas and concept and then we discuss that together. From this stage we work up a design, this includes working drawings and making a set model. The design process carries on throughout the rehearsal process so that the actors and the direction taken by the team can influence the design.

This set is designed in Traverse, why did you make that decision?

From our early discussion of the show we talked about the intimacy of the story and we wanted to incorporate this into the design. The advantage in our studio space is that we can play around with the seating and put it wherever we want so had the flexibility to create something different.

Lighting - What was challenging about designing the lights for this play?

The limitations of the space meant that we had to more creative with our design, as it isn't a theatre we can't do all the things we can in the main stage space, for example the ceiling doesn't have the same flexibility with loads of space to hang various lights. This production is staged in Traverse so we had to find a way of lighting the stage and the actors without lighting the front three rows.



with the INTERVIEWS ACTORS

Interview with Semu Filipo

What do you enjoy most about performing in Niu Sila?

Telling a beautiful New Zealand story that hopefully moves the audience through a journey of emotions.

What are the challenges of performing in this play?

For me it was making clear transitions between characters. Not to muddle them when changing character so the audience knew exactly who I was playing at the time.

Can you describe your character Ioane in 5 words?

Ioane is....cheeky, easy going, loyal, a gentle giant.

Interview with Gregory Cooper

What do you enjoy most about performing in Niu Sila?

Being able to play alongside a great actor like Semu. It's important in any play to be able to trust the other actors on stage and know they'll be there for you if anything goes pear-shaped, but with a two-hander it's essential. Luckily for me not only is Semu an amazingly talented actor who takes his

craft very seriously, he's also very funny and likes to keep things fresh by interacting with the audience and improvising which I love.

What are the challenges of performing in this play?

The main challenge for me is driving the story forward and keeping the energy up during the direct-to-audience narration pieces. The narration must flow seamlessly in and out of the flash-back scenes so the audience is kept 'in the world', even though I'm breaking the fourth wall and talking directly to them. Also because we're doing the show in traverse with audience on either side, I have to make sure to keep both audience banks engaged. Remembering what character you're meant to be suddenly switching into is also a bit tricky.

Can you describe your character Peter in 5 words?

Thoughtful, egalitarian, shy, optimistic, dependable.



PETER BURTON
GREGORY COOPER



IOANE TAFIOKA
SEMU FILIPO

PACIFICA THEATRE

In 2009 The Court Theatre hosted an exciting partnership with the Pacifica writers Tanya Muagututi'a and Joy Vaele in a production of Angels. Robert Gilbert, Director of this production reflects on this project.....

In what way was Angels a special project for you?

It was an absolute thrill for me that the The Court Theatre not only programmed this play, but also took it to the Pasifika community with a short season at Aranui High School before transferring to The Forge. Even though the play dealt with some difficult issues within the community, I think it was the real sense of ownership in having their stories presented through the medium of theatre that resonated with so many.

Are you excited that Niu Sila is being performed at The Court Theatre?

Definitely. There are fine writers telling mature New Zealand stories that embrace our unique place in the world. Dave Armstrong and Oscar Kightley are keen observers of human nature and brilliant social commentators.

What do you hope will happen in the future to showcase the talents of Pacific theatre makers?

We must nurture them, and celebrate them. There is a place in our theatre, New Zealand theatre, for Maori, Indian, Asian, Pasifika stories. More please. More.

Also check out this short film about Angels

<https://youtu.be/-r-5L6Llywo>

For more examples of Pacifica work look at:

Playwrights

- Oscar Kightley
- Victor Rodger
- John Kneubuhl
- Makerita Ulrale
- Shimpal Lelisi
- David Fane

Also check out this:

The Naked Samoans

Also take a look at Auckland Theatre Company's Education Pack for Niu Sila, which contains a great short history of Pacifica Theatre in New Zealand.

http://www.atc.co.nz/media/274329/atc-niusila-edupack_web.pdf