Muscle Mouth & Ross McCormack

ARTS FESTIVAL

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8-10 March • ASB Waterfront Theatre



Artistic Statement from director, Ross McCormack

I have long been affected by the monumental sculptures of American artist Richard Serra who creates incredible art works from large-scale assemblies of sheet metal. Formidable in size, they command the space, imposing coordinates, rules, structure and wonder.

To me, his sculptures are raw representations of the giant industrial bones upon which our modern world rests. There is a huge amount of movement and turmoil inherent within his work. It's impossible for the epically large steel monoliths not to be disorientating, for them not to evoke an immediate rush of responses. These instinctive reactions are felt in our bodies foremost, obliterating any kind of refuge that knowing they're man-made objects might provide. We see, feel and respond before we think.

There is also an enormous amount of motion and chaos within something as simple as a rock – it just depends on the rock. A rock that is hoisting itself up and out of the earth for reasons unknown to us, is unusual in its shape and positioned at an odd angle, will also evoke boundless curiosity. How many holiday snaps have we seen of people in front of natural monuments, of people traversing incredible rock formations. We are drawn in, we walk across fields, over fences and water, to touch, inspect, unearth something as seemingly simple as a large rock. This has been going on for a long time.

1hr 10mins approx. no interval

COVER IMAGE:
GARTH BADGER, THIEVERY STUDIO
IMAGES:
ANDI CROWN PHOTOGRAPHY

I am endlessly fascinated by the curiosity that drives these similar responses to such vastly different objects: the first, man-made and grounded in our industrial revolution heritage; the second, completely timeless and organic. It is more than simply a relationship to scale; we are more curious animals than that. Reactions charge through us when a potent structure or object enters or occupies our world. There is such a pull, and it can take us in many different directions and battlegrounds; human curiosity is one of our biggest strengths and also our Achilles heel. This deeply rooted, active human curiosity and the conflict it evokes is a constant source of choreographic research for me, one that never exhausts itself.

And so these boundless sources of inspiration, exploration and fascination lead us here, to the world of *As It Stands*. This is a place where the extraordinary, virtuosic human body meets its curious mind, where we are free to sink into a sculptural landscape and see where our overwhelming human curiosity might take us.

As It Stands takes place in a world where mystery and knowledge sit alongside each other, at a fork in the road where relentless curiosity often takes us. Do we touch or not touch? Neither way is the right way, neither is the best way, after all. What is one person's order is another's chaos. I can't believe you had to touch that. I can't believe you couldn't.



Muscle Mouth would like to thank the following people and organisations for their generous support and contributions towards the creation of *As It Stands*:

Josh Bailey; Katrina Todd; Mike Mizrahi and Marie Adams; Jenny Todd; Unitec Institute of Technology, Te Whare Wānanga o Wairaka's Performing & Screen Arts programmes, especially the Contemporary Dance Department; Garth Badger and Thievery Studio; Event Base; Aaron Woodhouse; Gibbs Farm, DANZ: Dance Aotearoa New Zealand; the Arts Foundation; Pippa Samaya; Danica Prowse; Deirdre Tarrant; Rose Campbell; Footnote New Zealand Dance; Nina Nawalowalo; Stanford Makishi.

Special thanks and gratitude to the incredible Auckland Arts Festival team for showing faith in us, especially Jonathan Bielski and Dolina Wehipeihana; and to Creative New Zealand for supporting the development of this new work.

Show Overview

Large sculptural structures punctuate the world of *As It Stands*. The dancers – the inhabitants and guardians of this world – are not here to describe or explain them to us. Instead, a driving force behind the creation of *As It Stands* has been to allow the environment itself to create the rules by which we move, to leave what's unexplained alone, to be relentlessly and unendingly influenced by the impact of the landscape itself. It was intentional that the shifting environment be free to influence the work's narrative and have authority over the choreography and performance design.

Within this world, a ritualistic landscape of scale and mystery has inevitably formed, curiosity arises and we are faced with a choice of how to respond. A desire for unity and shared experience has emerged just as much as a desire to break apart and destroy. We observe some wishing to sink into the world's mystery and timelessness, to leave things alone and sit in the unknown in order to fulfill a desire to honour and unify. Others wish to immediately decipher, understand, unearth, comprehend, draw energy and break things apart so they can move forward and create order. Curiosity continues to take us in conflicting directions.

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Muscle Mouth

Muscle Mouth takes a visceral and sculptural approach to creating dance works, and has been described as a company that creates the "kind of contemporary dance work that many of us crave and very rarely get" (Radio New Zealand). Since forming in 2014 with a commission from the New Zealand Festival, Muscle Mouth has received widespread acclaim for presenting provocative, highly charged works that powerfully integrate dance and performance design.

Muscle Mouth's four co-founders (Artistic Director and Set Designer Ross McCormack, Sound Designer Jason Wright, Light Designer Natasha James and Dramaturg Melanie Hamilton) have been working together since 2014, finding new ways to present highly detailed, multi-sensory worlds that audiences can immerse themselves within. This designled approach is a distinctive feature of Muscle Mouth's working process; while it does not shy away from flirting with theatrical form, narrative, visual art and filmic influences, the company's work is always firmly grounded in

the expressive, compelling moving body, at the place where dance and design meet.

Since Muscle Mouth's first work *AGE* premiered at the 2014 New Zealand Festival, the company has created *Triumphs and Other Alternatives* (2015), which toured New Zealand and to the Seoul International Dance Festival and Busan Arts Market; *The Weight of Force* (2016), which premiered at the Hong Kong Arts Festival and then toured to Singapore's M1 Contact Contemporary Dance Festival; *Area*² (2017) an international collaboration with Singapore's T.H.E Dance Company; and *System* (2018) which premiered at Auckland's Tempo Dance Festival.

As It Stands brings together a cast of eight international class dancers who have been working alongside a passionate group of designers, scenic artists, engineers and technicians. Muscle Mouth gratefully acknowledges and thanks all those involved in bringing As It Stands to the stage for you tonight.



Credits



Director, Choreographer & Set Designer

Ross McCormack

Sound DesignerJason Wright

Light Designer Natasha James **Technical Designer** Isaac McCormick

DramaturgMelanie Hamilton

Costume Designer Vicki Slow Dancers

James Vu Anh Pham Lauren Langlois Luke Hanna Emily Adams Jeremy Beck Tiana Lung Christina Guieb Toa Paranihi **Understudy** Elijah Kennar

Production ManagerNatasha James

Stage ManagerBridget Carpenter

Scenic Artist & A.V Designer Owen McCarthy

Scenic & Props Assistant

Eliza Sanders

ProducerMelanie Hamilton

Creatives

ROSS McCORMACK

Director, Choreographer & Set Designer

Ross McCormack graduated from the New Zealand School of Dance in 2001 and went on to perform with Douglas Wright Dance Company and the Royal New Zealand Ballet. In 2003 Ross joined Australian Dance Theatre where he worked closely with Garry Stewart on the creation of several new works which toured the United States and Europe. In 2004 Ross won the Best Male Dancer Helpmann Award for his performance in Held, a collaboration between Australian Dance Theatre and New York dance photographer Lois Greenfield.

From 2004 to 2015 Ross was based in Europe, working with Alain Platel at Les Ballets C de la B in Belgium. He performed in *VSPRS* (2006, direction Alain Platel), *Patchagonia* (2007, direction Lisi Estaras), *Out of Context – For Pina* (2010, direction Alain Platel) and *Tauberbach* (2014, direction Alain Platel).

In 2011 Ross also performed with Australia's Chunky Move touring Connected to the United States, and then joined Les Ballets in Japan to continue touring Out of Context. In November 2012 Ross joined Melbourne dance company Lucy Guerin Inc to perform Untrained at BAM, New York and Mondavi Arts Center, California, and then for a tour of Ireland, the UK and Greece in May 2013.

In 2013 Ross joined fellow Les Ballets C de la B dancers in Korea to collaborate on an independent creation NowNow, and then performed Out of Context with the company at the prestigious Festival d'Avignon. Between January 2014 and December 2015 Ross performed in Alain Platel's highly acclaimed Tauberbach, a show that has won multiple international awards since its premiere. Ross returned to work with Les Ballets C de la B in November 2017. to perform Out of Context in Girona and Madrid, and reunited with them in Paris January 2019 to perform the work once again on the ten year anniversary of the passing of Pina Bausch.



In 2017 Ross performed with Auckland Theatre Company, alongside Michael Hurst, playing Mozart in their sell out season of *Amadeus*. In 2018 he was invited to teach at The International Choreographic Workshop held in Seoul, and then joined long time collaborator Hyo Seung Ye (from Les Ballets) in Seoul the same year to co-create *Voice of Acts* with company BluePoet, which premiered in October in Seoul.

Alongside his performance career Ross has been forging his distinctive, highly physical choreographic practice. He has been commissioned to choreograph several short works for New Zealand companies: (SEX) (2012) and Stealth (2009) for Footnote New Zealand Dance; Preface: Homage to a Risk (2015); Visions of Salome (2015); SUM (2011) and Symbiotic (2008) for New Zealand School of Dance; Nga hau e wha: Papa Nuku (2011) for Okareka Dance Company; Area (2015) and Rāhui (2012) for Unitec; and Matter (2016) for New Zealand Dance Company.

In Australia Ross choreographed his first full-length work *Nowhere Fast* (2009) for Dancenorth, Townsville, which toured to the Macau Cultural Centre, China in September 2010. He then created [SIC] (2011), also for Dancenorth, and short work *I said HaHa* (2011) for Link Dance Company, Perth. In April 2016 Ross returned to Dancenorth to create a new work *If Form Was Shifted* as part of a double-bill programme with Australian choreographer, Stephanie Lake, which has since toured in Australia.

In 2014 Ross co-founded Muscle Mouth, where he is Artistic Director. The company has since premiered and toured many works of critical acclaim. Ross directed and choreographed AGE, the company's inaugural show, commissioned and presented by the 2014 New Zealand Festival. Muscle Mouth then premiered *Triumphs and Other Alternatives* in 2015, a show which Ross directed and performs the central role. *Triumphs* has since toured New Zealand and to the Australian Performing Arts Market and the 2017 Seoul International Dance Festival.

Next, Muscle Mouth premiered *The Weight of Force*, a solo show performed by Ross, at the 2016 Hong Kong Arts Festival, and then toured the show to the M1 Contact Contemporary Dance Festival, Singapore. In 2017 Muscle Mouth undertook its first international collaboration, presenting *Area*² as part of Borderline, a new double-bill season that premiered in Singapore with T.H.E. Dance Company. Most recently, the company presented *System* at the 2018 Tempo Dance Festival in 2018, a work featuring Ross and Luke Hanna.

In addition to performing, choreographing and directing, Ross has also designed all of the sets for his works. Of special note are his designs for *Triumphs and Other Alternatives* and performance installation *Tiger* (2015), both of which received much praise.

In 2016 Ross was awarded the prestigious Creative New Zealand Choreographic Fellowship, and in 2017 was named a New Zealand Arts Foundation Laureate.



JASON WRIGHT

Sound Designer

Jason Wright is a Wellington-based composer and sound artist working across dance, theatre, film and installation. A graduate of Te Kōkī New Zealand School of music, Jason holds a Master of Music in Sonic Arts and Composition.

He is the creator and curator of the Low Noise Exhibition series (Parliament 2013; Toi Poneke 2015); these group shows also featured his latest sound works Installation for Inward and Outward Facing Speaker Cones and Black Series. Some of his other recent sound installation work includes Jukebox, Adam Art Gallery (2011): Interview with Mute, Matchbox Gallery (2012): a collaborative installation When Bertha Sinas. Nvco Chocolate Factory (2013); Black Series II, The Auricle (2015): sound design for Muscle Mouth's multimedia installations Tiger and Another Garden at Enjoy Gallery (2015): and his latest works an Artifact of Mass, Audio Foundation (2016) and Dead Organics I+II (2018).

Working with dance, Jason has composed music for Strive, Footnote Taster Series (2013); Just Bet/ween Us, Choreo-co (2015). As well as composing, he performed in eye, produced by Brothers & Sisters Collective, which featured in the Fringe Festival and Tempo Dance Festival 2014

A key collaborator with choreographer Ross McCormack, Jason created the music for (SEX), Footnote Dance (2012); Rāhui, Unitec Dance Showcase (2015); Visions of Salome, M1 Contact Dance Festival Singapore (2015); Preface: Homage to a Rīsk, NZSD (2015); and Matter, New Zealand Dance Company (2016)

As a part of Muscle Mouth, Jason produced scores for AGE, New Zealand Festival (2014); their acclaimed production Triumphs and Other Alternatives (2015) and The Weight of Force at Hong Kong Arts Festival and M1 Contact Dance Festival (2016); and Borderline, a double-bill collaboration between Muscle Mouth and T.H.E Dance Company, Singapore, which premiered in the M1 Contact Dance Festival (2017).

Work for theatre includes Force Field by Everybody Cool Lives Here (Winner of Best Overall Production Design, Auckland Fringe, 2018); Snu's Song by Capital E National Theatre for Children (Nominated for Best Music Composition, Wellington Theatre Awards, 2016); Versions of Allah by Ohokomo productions, Kia Mau Festival (2016); and The Fence by Brothers & Sisters Collective (Nominated for Best Sound Design, Wellington Theatre Awards, 2016).

Latest work includes a score for new work *Odd One Out* by Capital E National Theatre for Children, and *System* by Muscle Mouth, both in 2018



NATASHA JAMES

Light Designer & Production Manager

Natasha James is a light designer and production manager who has worked throughout New Zealand, Australia and Europe. A co-founder of Muscle Mouth, Natasha is a key collaborator with Ross McCormack. She light designed Nowhere Fast, a collaboration they undertook for Dancenorth, Australia in 2009, which toured to Macau, and has light designed Muscle Mouth dance works AGE, Triumphs and Other Alternatives, The Weight of Force and System, as well as art installations Tiger and Another Garden.

Natasha has production managed multiple tours across Australia, including an 18-week tour of *Jack Charles V the Crown*, and toured award-winning dance and theatre shows throughout Europe, the United Kingdom, Israel, Canada and the United States.

Natasha is Technical Manager of World of Wearable Art, and was Production Manager of Cuba Dupa and Senior Production Manager for the New Zealand Festival. She also works with a number of established New Zealand performance companies including Barbarian Productions, and Tawata Productions.



MELANIE HAMILTON

Dramaturg & Producer

Melanie Hamilton is a dramaturg and producer, experienced in working across multiple art forms. A graduate of the New Zealand School of Dance, she collaborates on dance, theatre and performance art projects, and has toured shows across New Zealand and internationally, working with many independent performance companies.

Melanie has produced a variety of large scale events, including the 2015 and 2017 Capital E National Arts Festivals, and the spectacular 2018 Jim Henson Retrospectacle. As an independent producer and dramaturg, Melanie works with a select group of artists who are focused on creating progressive new forms of live performance. Most recently she collaborated with Meg Rollandi and Isobel MacKinnon on *Actual Fact*, the 2018 STAB Commission.

A co-founder of Muscle Mouth, Melanie has been an integral part of the company's creations, and in her producing capacity works to develop international networks for the company. Her focus has most recently been in Asia where the company has presented at various festivals and arts markets.



Dancers





JAMES VU ANH PHAM

James Vu Anh Pham has been working extensively with Chunky Move – Anouk Van Dijk since 2012, performing in An Act of Now, 247 Days, Complexity of Belonging, Depth of Field, Rule of Thirds, Gentle is the Power and AORTA by Stephanie Lake, commissioned by Chunky Move.

In Europe James has worked with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's Eastman, performing in Babel 7.16 in the Palais des Papes for the Festival d'Avignon, guesting in RAVEL at Royal Ballet of Flanders, ICON at GöteborgsOperans Danskompani, Les Indes Galantes in collaboration with the Bayerische Staatsoper Munich and Satyagraha at Theater Basel. James was the lead role in Christophe Coppens' Le Mandarin Merveilleux at La Monnaie de Munt Opera house in Brussels.

James will continue his career in the United Kingdom with Akram Khan Dance Company from 2019.

Independently James has performed in Triumphs and Other Alternatives with Muscle Mouth and World of Wearable Art (2015)

James received the "Best Male Dancer in a Dance or Physical Theatre Work" 2014 Helpmann Award for his performance in 247 Days and the Outstanding Performance by a Male Dancer 2014 Australian Dance Award for AOPTA

He has been studying Countertechnique intensively since 2012, and became a certified teacher in 2014.

LAUREN LANGLOIS

Lauren Langlois began her career with the Australian Dance Theatre and Sydney Dance Company before relocating to Melbourne in 2012 to collaborate on *Keep Everything*, Antony Hamilton's critically-acclaimed work for Chunky Move.

For her performance in *Keep Everything* she has been nominated for Helpmann, Green Room and Australian Dance Awards. And since her arrival at Chunky Move, Lauren has collaborated with Anouk van Dijk intensively, performing in *An Act of Now* (2012), *247 Days* (2013), *Complexity of Belonging* (2014) and *LUCID* (2016). For her work in *Complexity of Belonging*, Lauren received the 2015 Green Room Award for Best Female Dancer

Lauren has also worked with Australia's leading choreographers, theatre directors and companies, including Force Majeure, Lucy Guerin Inc, Stephanie Lake Company, Antony Hamilton, Prue Lang, Samara Hersch and Chamber Made. In 2017, she was the recipient of the Tanja Liedtke Fellowship and has since choreographed works for the New Zealand School of Dance and Footnote New Zealand Dance.

In 2018, Lauren was commissioned by Chunky Move to choreograph Nether, a short work which premiered in Melbourne as part of the Next Move season. She studied classical ballet at the Marie Walton-Mahon Dance Academy in Newcastle before training in contemporary dance at the New Zealand School of Dance.







LUKE HANNA

Born and bred in Petone, Wellington, Luke Hanna graduated from the New Zealand School of Dance in 2006. Since graduating he has worked for leading dance companies and choreographers such as Black Grace, Australian Dance Theatre, Dance North, New Zealand Dance Company, Muscle Mouth, Shaun Parker, Douglas Wright and Malia Johnston.

Luke has danced his way across the continents of Australasia, Europe, Asia and America. In 2009 he was nominated for the prestigious Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative. Luke tutors at the New Zealand School of Dance and has developed the Tu Move programme for young males as a pathway into tertiary dance programmes.

He choreographed the 2013 Weta charity event *Project Born* as well as the Black Seeds music video *Cracks In Our Crown*, and works as a Movement Advisor for stage productions such as Capital E's *Stealing Games* by Gary Henderson and *Tinderbox* by Playground Collective.

Since returning to Wellington Luke has co-founded an exciting new initiative, the Brothers & Sisters Collective, an enterprise that crafts and harvests experiences for growth through art, education and community. With Brothers & Sisters Luke created and toured his first full-length work, eye, and co-directed the theatre production The Fence.

EMILY ADAMS

Emily Adams began dancing at the age of five and initially trained in ballet and American Jazz. In 2004 she studied contemporary dance full-time at the New Zealand School of Dance. She freelanced (2007–10) working with Timothy Gordon, Mary-Jane O'Reilly, Inside Out Productions, Carol Brown, London Urban Soul Orchestra, Vospertron, 'Darkroom' motion graphics and World of Wearable Art (2004, 2010–13, 2015).

Emily joined Footnote New Zealand Dance (2011-14), where she worked with Kate MacIntosh, Jo Randerson, Sarah Foster-Sproull, Ross McCormack. Lisa Densem, Malia Johnston, Kristian Larsen, Claire O'Neil, and Olive Beiringa. She toured with Footnote throughout New Zealand and overseas to London. Antwerp, Berlin, Frankfurt and San Francisco. Since 2014 she has been working with Muscle Mouth, touring Triumphs and Other Alternatives in New Zealand, Australia and South Korea, In 2016 she worked with Okareka Dance Company (new development) and later toured their *Mana Wahine* performances in Auckland and Wellington. She also performed Michael Parmenter's Duet Insolent River (Tempo Festival).

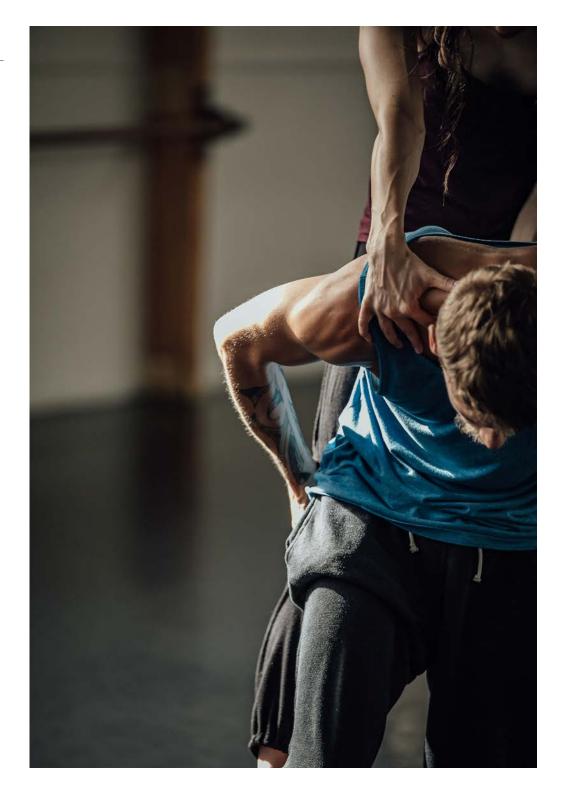
Emily worked and performed with The New Zealand Dance Company for the creation of Ross McCormack's Matter ('The Absurdity of Humanity' season and 2017 national tour), the premiere season of 'Kiss the Sky' and toured to Europe in works by Ross McCormack and Stephanie Lake in the 2018 season of 'Time' (Bruges, La louvierre and Luxembourg). She works as a pilates instructor and a mentor/educator for Polestar Pilates NZ, and also teaches professional and pre-professional contemporary dance classes.

JEREMY BECK

Born in Dunedin, Jeremy Beck started dancing at the age of six. After graduating from the New Zealand School of Dance in 2014, he went on to join Footnote New Zealand Dance as a full-time company dancer.

After leaving Footnote in late 2016, Jeremy has since worked with Atamira Dance Company, World of Wearable Art Awards Show, Muscle Mouth, Tohu Productions, Tupua Tigafua and other independent choreographers across New Zealand and Australia.

Jeremy has also created commissioned works for Footnote New Zealand Dance and recently an independence dance solo *know one* in the Wellington Fringe Festival.





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TIANA LUNG

Born in Sydney, Tiana studied at the New Zealand School of Dance where she graduated in 2016 with a Diploma in Dance Performance. After graduating, Tiana worked with Taki Rua Productions alongside renowned New Zealand musicians Tiki Taane and Sam Trevethick on their National Tour of Tiki Taane Mahuta. She then joined Okareka Dance Company as part of the cast of Mana Wahine, which toured internationally throughout the year to Holland, Tahiti, Australia and Canada.

During 2018, Tiana joined Discotheque Dance Company for their new work *Missing Lids*, developed as part of Wellesley Studios Summer residency and went on to premiere in Auckland. She then rejoined the cast of Okareka Dance Company's *Mana Wahine* for their international tour of Hawaii.

Returning to Sydney, Tiana worked with Kristina Chan on the first development of her new work *BRIGHTNESS*. She joined the cast as a dancer for the 30th year anniversary of the *World of Wearable Art* Awards Show in Wellington.

Ending the year, Tiana worked with Sydney-based company Legs on the Wall as a guest performer at the Ev & Bow Full Time Dance Training Centre 2019 Graduation.

CHRISTINA GUIEB

Born and raised in Wellington, Christina studied full-time training at the New Zealand School of Dance from 2015–17. Her highlights during her time at the school include performing Christina Chan and Aymeric Bichon's duet *Midlight* at the Chop Shop Festival 2017 in Seattle. Another, working one-on-one with Lauren Langlois who choreographed her solo *Creatùra* for the NZSD 2017 Solo Season *ONCE*, which toured to Tempo Festival 2017.

After graduating, Christina performed in the Auckland Arts Festival 2018 and New Zealand Festival 2018 with the New Zealand Dance Company on their premiere season of Orpheus—A Dance Opera, choreographed by Michael Parmenter. She performed in House of Sand's Fear of Eggs, which premiered as part of the 2018 Wellington Fringe Festival. She has also worked closely on various developments with Java Dance Theatre, Ross McCormack, Daniel Belton and Eliza Sanders.

She has just recently worked again with the New Zealand Dance Company on their *TIME* tour to Europe, performing works by Stephanie Lake (*If Never Was Now*) and Ross McCormack (*Matter*).

TOA PARANIHI

Tūwharetoa & Ngāti Porou

Toa Paranihi, a 2017 graduate of the New Zealand School of Dance, is a freelance contemporary/hip-hop dancer. He was born in Lower Hutt, Wellington and has spent most of his life there.

Before contemporary dance, Toa was deeply involved in the hip-hop scene, competing both nationally and internationally for crews INTERNS, TCNZ megacrew and ASSOCIATES (which he was also a co-choreographer). These competitions sparked an interest in movement beyond the limitations of competition rules, which led him to contemporary dance.

Toa performed in the 2016 and 2017 NZSD graduation seasons in works including Hofesh Shechter's *Political Mother*, Okareka Dance Company's *He Taanga*, Michael Parmenter's *Bach and Victoria* and Columbus' *Sub*, which he assisted choreographing with Connor Masseurs. He has also performed and worked with Australian Dance Theatre in *Beginning of Nature*, and with the New Zealand Dance Company on Michael Parmenter's *Orpheus—A Dance Opera*. Most recently he has also been backup dancing in China for Jolin Tsai.

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