# Ka Tito Au - Written Introductory Notes

## Introduction

Kupe, the great Pacific explorer and navigator, is the hero of this lively, lyrical solo show by Apirana Taylor. Legend has it that Kupe discovered Aotearoa after pursuing Te Wheke-a-Muturangi, a giant octopus that was endangering his people’s fishing grounds in the Pacific. Ka Tito Au is an enchanting tale of Kupe’s many exploits.

Descriptive notes are provided by Auckland Arts Festival based on a previous performance. They are intended to be read by blind and low vision patrons prior to the show to enhance understanding of the visual elements of the performance. They introduce the performer, costume, set and props and give an outline of the show.

## Introductory Notes and Description

Ka Tito Au is performed on a narrow stage with audience on either side (traverse stage). It is a simple set up; there is no set, or raised platform stage, no recorded sound and no lighting effects.

The main character in Ka Tito Au is Kupe, who is performed by Tola Newbery. At times Kupe switches into other characters. To demonstrate these transitions the performer adjusts his voice, body language and on occasions his costume. On other occasions he recounts the words or stories of characters in the third person, as an orator.

During the performance the characters dart nimbly around the stage, often gesticulating into the distance to evoke imagined places or things. Some actions are reinforced by basic mime, and elements of kapa haka movement accompany his Māori chants.

The actor who plays Kupe is a young man, with short dark hair, and facial hair. He wears contemporary clothing; a black leather jacket, worn over a brown long sleeved hooded top, and black trousers. Over the top of his trousers he wears a brown apron, and black high cut boots.

His mythical storytelling is accompanied by four props. A closed piece of pipe filled with rice, which makes the sound resonant of the ocean when inverted; the “song of the sea”. Two stones are used at varying times to create, sound and rhythm when knocked together; “the song of rock”. At times Kupe removes the brown apron tied to his waist to become a sail; he stands on the string on one end of the apron and holds the other string taut at waist height evoking a sail.

The show begins when Kupe places the ocean stick and two stones at the centre of the bare stage. He walks to the end of the stage and facing away from the audience pauses, then begins. We hear about Kupe’s life in Raiatea, his early history and beginnings. We meet the Priest of Rangiatea, an ancestral guardian who teaches him to navigate and constantly reminds him to “learn and remember, boy”. When in character the Priest wears the hood, and speaks in an oratorical manner.

“Who am I?” Kupe asks. He announces his whakapapa marking the lineages on his body with his right hand, working down his arms, trunk and thighs as he says their names. He traces his lineage back to the Gods, to demi-god Maui-Tikitiki-a-Taranga and a child of Tangaora.

Time passes and Kupe grows from a boy into a man. He removes the black hooded jumper and lies on the floor holding the two stones on his bare chest. He taps the stones together which tunes into the ancient art form of Ta Moko. A ritual that transitions Kupe from boyhood to manhood.

Chest bare, arms outstretched, Kupe flows through the space with his new (imaginary) ta moko, showing off as the navigator, voyager, overflowing with knowledge and pride.

We then meet Hoturapa, the man Kupe left beneath the sea in Raiatea and Kupe took his wife (Kura Marotini) to be his own. Before Kupe and his people leave in search of a new home, we meet Hine Te Aparangi, Kupe’s first wife. She argues with Kupe about the dangers of Te Wheke o Muturangi. Kupe leaves with his children, leaving Hine Te Aparangi behind.

Silence fills the space when Kupe and Te Wheke first encounter each other. Te Wheke emerges, his hood covering his face showing only his mouth. He stands in a low crouch with his legs bent and knees out to the side. His sleeves extend beyond his fingers, floating and flapping like tentacles. Te Wheke taunts Kupe who raises his sail to pick up speed and chase Te Wheke; his mana blighted he has no choice but war.

Kura Marotini the second wife of Kupe introduces herself. Transitioning into a wāhine the apron is tucked into trousers like the long tailed cuckoo (kohoperoa), and hips sway gracefully from side to side in a dance. She cries “He ao, he ao, he aotearoa! A land of the shining day, the glistening cloud”.

Kupe and his iwi settle in the plentiful new land Aotearoa. He recounts the tales of early settlement. We learn how he uses servants to do his work. Rupe, who we meet on one end of the stage, with his wrists tucked into his hips, chest out and bent at the knees to resemble a pigeon, is sent out to the bush to search for food. And Te Kawau A Toru, who speaks through his nose, shoulders tucked up to his ears, arms stretched out like wings, and fingers flared like that of a shags feather, ventures the coasts of Aotearoa to search for the tide & currents.

We hear the sound of a fantail and crow through a small wind instrument, a flute Kupe wears around his neck. Kupe begins to gather the undergrowth of the trees, and tie it high above his head to the karaka tree branches, letting new arrivals know that it was Kupe who was here first.

We then meet and hear the voices of the fantail and the crow Kupe’s sons, Kokako and Tirairaka, who greet the new arrivals onto the land with a pōwhiri. They have a younger & lighter energy about them. Much cheekier compared to the characters we’ve seen so far. Their feet springing from the floor with bent legs and chest forward, arms behind their back often evoke a laugh from the audience. Kupe recounts stories of his whānau’s settlement across Aotearoa. Kupe announces “I’ve sailed, I’ve named, I’ve danced with the gods”, and missing the islands of his birth he sets sail. On the ocean he encounters Te Wheke again and the story climaxes with a great battle. “Te Wheke o Muturangi! I hear you you bastard!” yells Kupe. Each exchanging attempts at taking each other down. They duel energetically across the stage as if sword fighting, Kupe and Te Wheke interchanging sides and characters at speed. Kupe swings with his left fist and strikes Te Wheke, using the folded apron to cross and hit his ribs making the sound of his strikes.

Te Wheke returns the damage with his extended sleeves, flowing his arms above his head, whipping Kupe with his sleeves. Kupe then begins to hit the apron against his hand, with his eyeline descending, showing us the slow defeat of Te Wheke. Kupe’s strikes grow bigger, leaping into the air landing his weapon upon the head of Te Wheke. Kupe finishes the battle with his ocean stick used as a spear, finishing off Te Wheke with four final strikes. Kupe unzips his hood, and chants his victory in bare feet and chest.

# Glossary and Characters

Rangiatea - ancestral homeland of ancient Polynesians, also known as Hawaiki

Whakapapa – Genealogy, Kupe’s whakapapa stretches across many tribes.

Tangaroa – God of the sea

Hinemoana – Goddess of the sea

The Priest of Rangiatea – Kupe’s guardian and teacher

Ta moko – Māori tattoo

Waka – canoe

Matahourua – Kupe’s canoe

Kura Marotini – Kupe’s second wife, taken from Hoturapa (Kupe’s relative)

Hine Te Aparangi – Kupe’s first wife

Kupe’s sons - Tutukuwhenua, Tirairaka, and Kokako

Kupes’s daughters – Matiu, Makaro, Hine te Uria, Mokotuarangi and Mohuia

Kupe’s pet birds – Rupe (pigeon) and Te Kawau a Toru (shag)

Te Kawau a Toru – is also referred to as Kupe’s servant, who his daughter Mohuia is in love with

Te Wheke a Muturangi – Muturangi’s giant pet octopus

Muturangi – A rival chief of Kupe, who owns Te Wheke as his slave

Mana – status, power and authority

Nga Whatu (The Brothers) - 2 clusters of rocks on the western side of Te Moana o Raukawa (Cook Strait)

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