



Othello reimagined by maori man and his masks

MEGAN GATTEY

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Bob Scott

Regan Taylor performing SolOthello outdoors with the maori performance masks.

Maori performance masks (te mata lokako o rehia) come to life for the first time in Wellington at the inaugural Kia Mau Festival as Regan Taylor reveals his adaptation of Shakespeare's Othello in his solo performance.

SoloOthello came about when Taylor decided to make Shakespeare more relatable to his friends and family.

For a long time, Shakespeare has gone unappreciated in certain communities, Taylor says.

Even he didn't like William Shakespeare's offerings very much when he first started investigating the stories.

"One of the things I knew about it is that it seemed old, but it was sort of three steps away from what I wanted to enjoy in theatre."

However, he quickly discovered that the themes in Othello still relevant today.

"So I wanted it to be accessible to my cousins and aunts and family at the marae; that was the challenge I set myself."

"I'm not arrogant enough to think I can rewrite Shakespeare, but I like comedy, I like te reo maori, and I like mask-work - so I am trying to combine that so people can have an avenue into the Shakespearean world."

Combining Shakespeare with maori has been a challenge, Taylor says, but it is rewarding to see different people under the same roof enjoying the same production.

"With Shakespeare, the use of language with the imagery is not too dissimilar to an orator giving a korero, or a speech in maori.

"The imagery that we use in spoken maori is often as poetic as Shakespearian, so combining them was a beautiful experience and discovery for myself."

Taylor feels connected to his roles in the play because the three carved masks represent being part of one tribe, or one iwi.

"Othello comes into this iwi unmasked. For me, the initial point of departure for exploration was: What if the context was a man from a different iwi that goes into another iwi and goes and marries in that iwi? What are the implications of that? That has happened in the past, so I wanted to explore it by putting it into a maori context."



Amaarbir Singh

Regan Taylor under one of the three maori performance masks.

The masks take on a life of their own when Taylor wears them.

"They sort of become their own characters. It becomes a very open vessel to the world that you are portraying; as a performer, I feel like Regan is not responsible for what the mask is going to say."

It is quite difficult to perform under them because they hold the perspiration in, Taylor says.

"But these ones are made out of totara wood, so they look deceptively heavy but they're actually really light."

Director Craig Geenty says some characters were cut and segments were adapted to create a more simplified version of the story.

"Some people notice that Desdemona is silent, and wonder why. In our adaptation, we are creating characters based on two half-masked characters and one fully-masked character. Desdemona's mask doesn't have a mouth, but there's a grace and a sustained quality to her movement."

Geenty says Taylor has been fantastic to work with because of his talent for creating things physically.



Bob Scott

Regan Taylor mid-performance at SolOthello.

"He's got a real instinct for visual language, a certain inventiveness in the way he manipulates the elements on stage."

Bringing SoloOthello to the capital is "a bit of a homecoming", Geenty says.

"I lived in Wellington for about seven years, finishing my directing masters at Toi Whakaari and Victoria University. It is very much one of my homes."

Taylor agrees, as he has a history working with Capital E and performing at Circa and Bats Theatre.

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THE DETAILS

*SoloOthello plays at Circa Theatre from June 15-18 at 7.30pm. Visit circa.co.nz to book.

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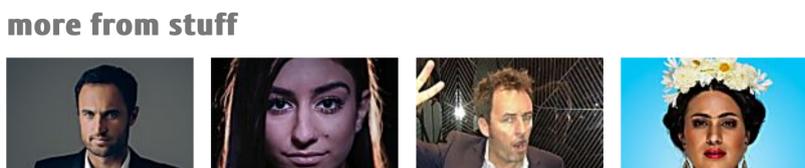
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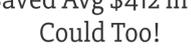
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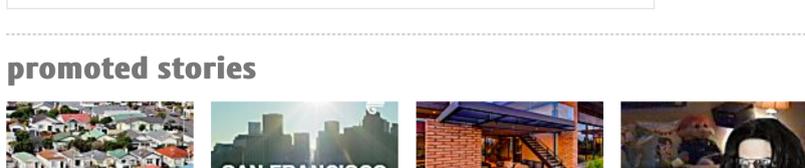
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