

THE OCEANIA DANCE THEATRE IN CONTEXT

Introduction / The Oceania Dance Theatre, based at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva, Fiji, is creating waves in the Pacific and beyond. Its success is due to: an atmosphere that encourages the freedom of the artist to create without boundaries; a visionary leader; a talented choreographer and a cadre of multicultural dancers rooted in their own cultures, but not bound by them; and an audience hungry for original and innovative works. The success of this initiative suggests that contemporary dance in the Pacific — in contrast to traditional dance — is less concerned with the purity of dance traditions or the ethnicity or race of its dancers than with creative fusions of dance forms that reflect urban experiences and connect us to a global community.¹

As contemporary dance groups become established and accepted widely in the Pacific, they begin to destabilise deep-seated notions that Pacific Islanders should only concern themselves with the dance forms of their specific cultures and refrain from venturing into dance traditions that are not theirs.² The result of this progressive ideology is that the focus is now shifting away from ethnicity or race; boundaries that have separated Pacific Islanders and other kin in the past are now crumbling. A new Oceania is emerging — one in which we are all connected — and the dance program at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture is at the forefront of this development.

Freedom to dance / In a moving speech by Moana Jackson of Aotearoa New Zealand at a United Nations Global Seminar at the University of Hawai'i in 2004, he reminded his audience of professors and students that

the terms 'Polynesia', 'Micronesia', and 'Melanesia' are divisive categories imposed on the Pacific region by the French navigator Jules Dumont d'Urville (1790–1842). By putting the people of Oceania into three different boxes, he 'broke down, weakened and, in some cases, destroyed the long traditions and histories which had joined us together'.³ Jackson also said that as a result of a history of colonisation in Oceania, Pacific Islanders have been preoccupied with a culture of survival as they adapted to realities imposed on them by their oppressors. The time has come, he exhorted, for Pacific Islanders to work towards a culture of freedom so they can define and represent who they are rather than have foreign powers continue to do so for them.

Epeli Hau'ofa, Director of the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, concurred with Jackson's assertion in his keynote address at the first academic conference on dance in Oceania, held at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, in Wellington, New Zealand, in 2005. Like Jackson, he sees the carving up of the Pacific into three different areas as responsible for severing our historical, social and cultural ties. According to Hau'ofa, the time has come for Pacific Islanders to find their lost relatives.⁴ Both Jackson and Hau'ofa clearly recognise the importance of Pacific Islanders taking charge of their present as well as their future. Both also advocate the need for the peoples of Oceania to be free from the shackles of colonialism and to recognise their common history and heritage.

But free to do what? In the context of this paper, free to dance any way we want, free to produce original dances that dazzle the eye, move the heart and speak to our human experience. Free to perform each other's

DANCING OCEANIA

VILSONI HERENIKO

Performance of *Fenua* (a contemporary interpretation of Tahitian traditional dance) by Oceania Dance Theatre at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific, Fiji, September 2006

Choreographer: Allan Alo / Image courtesy: Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific, Fiji / Photograph: Ann Tarte



Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific, Fiji, 2005
Queensland Art Gallery Image Archive



dance traditions if we wish to, as well as adapt them for present-day audiences without fear of being ridiculed or abused. Overall, however, Pacific Islanders are very protective about their traditional dances and frown upon outsiders who appropriate their dance styles or movements. The reason for this attitude is our present fear that, if we don't protect our traditional dances from foreign interests, we will lose what has taken us years to recover.

A historical overview / When missionaries entered the Pacific in the late eighteenth century, one of the first things they did was try to eradicate Pacific dance, together with other aspects of island life they regarded as heathen. The first missionaries linked dance with paganism and, in most parts of the Pacific, forbade their new converts to dance.⁵ An example from Tahiti should suffice to illustrate this wide-spread practice. In 1796, the London Missionary Society sent its first missionaries to Tahiti and, in 1814, they began to meet with success. When King Pomare became a Christian — as was the case with many other parts of the Pacific when kings or chiefs converted — the rest of the inhabitants 'renounced idolatry, and destroyed their idols, or gave them up to the missionaries'.⁶ About this time, the missionaries succeeded in abolishing the Arioi Society, a religious order that engaged in dance and play-acting when its members travelled from one island to another.

The missionary William Ellis had nothing positive to say about the Society and its practices. Words like 'abominable', 'unutterable' and 'debased' proliferate in his descriptions. However, Ellis was correct in his

observation that the Tahitians' 'system of religion was interwoven with every pursuit of their lives'.⁷ Tahitian dance, like other dances forbidden by missionaries in the Pacific, survived because of its centrality to the cultural identities of Tahitians.⁸ Determined to keep dancing, practitioners passed on their knowledge of dances in secret until the public arena was safe for the re-emergence of traditional dance — in many instances, around the 1960s and 1970s.

The revival of ancient dance practices meant trying to remember, record, relearn and perpetuate dances previously forbidden. However, because of social, cultural and religious changes in the years between missionary arrival and the return of traditional dance into the public arena, what was revived was not exactly the same as what was practised on the eve of missionary intervention. The word 'traditional' has therefore become a source of contention, and is often interpreted instead to mean what is acceptable in contemporary Christian society.⁹

The Festival of Pacific Arts / The first South Pacific Festival of Arts, held in Suva, Fiji, in 1972, provided an arena for the disconnected and marginalised efforts of dance practitioners throughout the Pacific to find strength in a collective vision. This was the first regional event that gave Pacific Islanders the confidence they needed to continue practising, teaching and performing their dances and other art forms. Although its name has changed to the Festival of Pacific Arts, its original mandate has remained largely unchanged. It continues to be the premiere festival in the Pacific region for the promotion and perpetuation of traditional Pacific dances.



Epeli Hau'ofa, Director of the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific, Fiji

Image courtesy: Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific, Fiji / Photograph: Ann Tarte

Held every four years, the festival has been hosted by the following Pacific Island countries: Fiji (1972), New Zealand (1976), Papua New Guinea (1980), French Polynesia (1985), Australia (1988), Cook Islands (1992), Samoa (1996), New Caledonia (2000) and Palau (2004).¹⁰ The host for each festival has tended to emphasise aspects of Pacific art it deemed important and, in the case of dance, some differences in opinion on what is appropriate costuming has emerged. For those with a fundamentalist interpretation of the bible, this does not include exposed breasts or buttocks even if such was the traditional practice.

At the Cook Islands festival, where indigenous Australian women performed topless, some spectators laughed at them; at the Samoa festival, one of the organisers slapped the bare buttocks of a male performer with a coconut frond to demonstrate his displeasure.¹¹ Such attempts to police what is allowable or not in what was originally intended to be an arena for the revival of 'tradition' reflect the diversity of Islanders' experiences and varying degrees of colonisation among island countries. It also underscores the importance of acknowledging that, although there are many aspects of Pacific cultures that are common throughout the Pacific, there are different colonial histories (the result of different colonial masters) and geographies (atolls versus volcanic islands, for example) that have made each island culture evolve in unique ways.

Westernisation or modernisation has had varying degrees of acceptance and importance among Pacific Island countries. The same is true of Christianity. Also, there are different phases in the decolonisation process. For example, Fiji, Samoa, the Solomon Islands and Papua New

Guinea are now independent, whereas the indigenous peoples of Hawai'i, New Zealand, French Polynesia and New Caledonia are still fighting for sovereignty. Ironically, some independent nations appear the most concerned about being covered up while performing their traditional dances, especially in countries where Church and State are closely allied.¹² However, traditional Pacific dance remains an integral part of Pacific Island cultures. Each country prides itself on perpetuating its cultural dances and its indigenous population can be very territorial about who has the right to perform its dances. Having the right pedigree is often more important than talent when it comes to selecting artists to participate at the Festival of Pacific Arts.

Outside the Festival of Pacific Arts, in formal contexts, it is still the norm to expect that only Samoans should perform Samoan dances, Tongans should perform Tongan dances, Hawaiians should perform the hula, and so on. When individuals have not adhered to this unwritten rule, they have been criticised by Pacific Islanders who see themselves as 'owners' of the dance.¹³ It takes a lot of courage for a Fijian, for example, to perform a hula. However, the context can influence what is allowable and what isn't. For example, an impromptu performance of the hula by a Caucasian at a wedding may be permissible but, in the present context of Hawai'i, will most likely be frowned upon by Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders in the audience. It would not surprise me if some were to walk out during such a performance as a way of protesting that their dance has been appropriated by a member of the race that at one time tried to kill it. Some may even call this act of appropriation neo-colonialism.



Epli Hau'ofa and staff of the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture sharing a meal at the University of the South Pacific, Fiji

Image courtesy: Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific, Fiji



Sculptor working at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific, Fiji

Image courtesy: Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific, Fiji / Photograph: Ann Tarte

There are certain public spaces where the ethnicity of the dancer doesn't matter so much to the viewer, but these performances are usually intended for tourists or for people who don't know any better. A tourist is unlikely to be able to tell the difference between Tongans, Samoans, Tahitians or Cook Islanders. They may not even care. Thus, at the Polynesian Cultural Center, all Polynesian ethnicities are interchangeable and, although the kinds of dances performed change from one island culture to another, the ethnicities of the performers do not change accordingly. As the number one tourist attraction in Hawai'i, the Polynesian Cultural Center is a big success financially. Yet their performers have never been chosen to represent Hawai'i at any Festival of Pacific Arts. Only Native Hawaiians have been chosen; the same practice exists for the rest of the Pacific.

The nation of Fiji usually represents itself at the Festival of Pacific Arts by sending four separate dance groups: Fijian, Indian, Rotuman, and Chinese. It is telling that, since 1972, Fiji has never allowed the same delegates to perform dances drawn from these four different dance traditions. From a financial point of view (a sore point every time the festival comes up), such an ensemble would save the country a lot of money because travel and other expenses would be greatly reduced since there would be fewer performers. Also, this kind of representation would mean that all performers would have to learn each others' dance traditions, and possibly the language and the culture. In terms of moulding a nation of diverse cultures and peoples, this notion appears politically astute and necessary. Yet, the idea remains unthinkable for the vast majority of Fiji's peoples, even after more than 125 years of living together.

The only dance in which Fiji's multicultural community participates as one is in the contemporary or creative dance category. Members of this dance ensemble at the 2004 Festival of Pacific Arts in Palau consisted of Fijians, Indians, Rotumans, and Chinese. They were an ad hoc group put together specifically for the festival, rather than an established dance ensemble. After the festival, the dancers dispersed. For a multicultural representation in dance to receive wide acceptance, a sustained and more professional approach is needed. This is where the dance program at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture comes in.

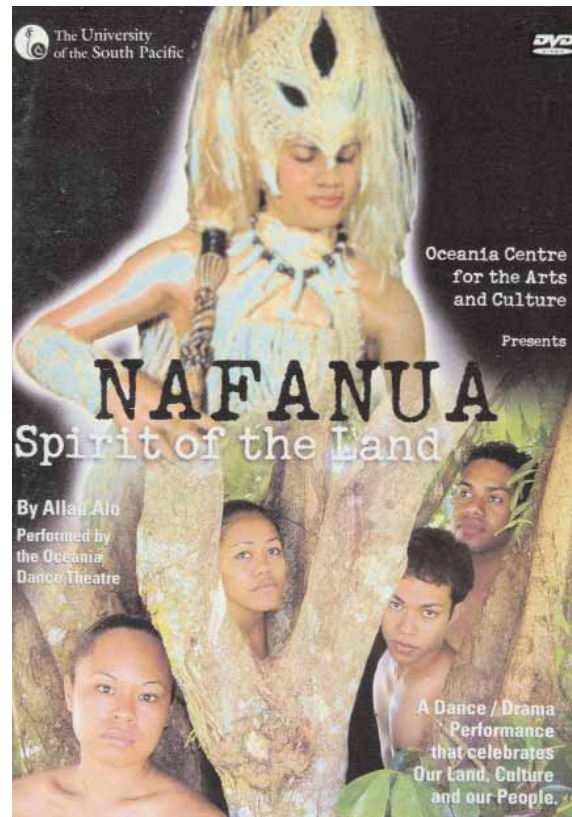
The Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture / The Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture was established in 1997 after many years of struggle for existence. Epeli Hau'ofa was appointed its Director but was not handed a job description. Because the USP's interest in arts and culture is minimal compared to its high regard for formal academic disciplines and programs, it allocated little money for the centre's development. Hau'ofa was given a program assistant and a part-time cleaner and left alone to either flounder or flourish. Seizing this rare opportunity to do something unconventional in academia, he brought together school drop-outs, unemployed youths, and part-timers and casuals, and facilitated their desire to be artists — be it painter, sculptor, musician or dancer.

Hau'ofa is ambivalent about formal training in the arts because it is more concerned with 'international standards' and developing aspiring artists 'away from our Oceanic base'.¹⁴ He supports Ulli and Georgina Beier — two influential catalysts in the growth of art and creative writing in



Ta-tau, a dance drama about traditional tattoo, performed by the Oceania Dance Theatre at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, Fiji in 2003. The 'woman' in the photograph is the male dancer, Pelu Fatiaki

Choreographer: Allan Alo / Image courtesy: Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific, Fiji / Photograph: Ann Tarte



DVD cover for *Nafanua: Spirit of the Land* Choreographed by Allan Alo and performed by Oceania Dance Theatre at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific, Fiji 2005

Papua New Guinea in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the formation of a philosophical foundation for the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture — in their view that formal Western training in the arts can stifle strong personalities and original creative talents. Thus, the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture employs a hands-on approach to teaching and learning so that students develop at their own pace; instead of emulating Western ideas and practices, they look to contemporary Pacific cultures as well as past and present experiences for inspiration. Every now and then, the centre invites a visiting artist with a unique Pacific perspective to reinvigorate and mentor its students. The first such artist was John Pule, the New Zealand-based Niuean artist whose work is inspired by the use of earth colours as well as tapa and mat designs.¹⁵

A student who participated in one of the painting workshops held at the centre was Allan Alo, originally from Samoa. Alo told Hau'ofa he wanted to develop his choreographic talent and Hau'ofa hired him on a part-time basis soon afterwards. In 2000, the Oceania Centre launched the Oceania Dance Theatre, with Allan Alo, Letava Tafuna'i and Katerina Martina Teaiwa as its founders.¹⁶ Now, Alo is a full-time lecturer at the centre, and is also its choreographer. Charismatic, talented and passionate about dance, Alo 'grew up learning traditional Samoan dance but since then has explored modern, contemporary, jazz and funk dancing'.¹⁷ After gathering a group of young people to work with him and with each other, he began developing dances that draw from Pacific cultures as well as from modern Western and Eastern dance forms. Like another artist at the centre, Sailasa Tora, who has developed a unique style of Fijian music,

Alo has developed a contemporary dance style that is new to the Pacific region.

In December 2005, I spent two weeks as artist-in-residence with the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture. During several conversations with the Director and through personal observation, I came away wishing that all Pacific Studies programs would have the kind of vision and atmosphere that exists at the centre. Hau'ofa is a gentle, dedicated, hardworking, generous and brilliant mentor of young people. Prior to being Director of the Oceania Centre, Hau'ofa was Head of the School of Social and Economic Development, the largest School at USP. He holds a PhD in anthropology from the Australian National University, has a long history of teaching at university level, and is one of the Pacific's most respected writers and public speakers. In short, he doesn't have to spend the best years of his life building up a centre from scratch. Yet, he has chosen to be director of one of the most poorly funded art and culture programs at any university, surrounded by young people who arrive at the centre, not through a rigorous selection process but through their own volition and a desire to create art.

In 2005, the artists involved with the Oceania Centre's programs consisted of Fijians, Indians, Rotumans, Solomon Islanders, Tongans, Samoans and Caucasians, all working harmoniously and learning with and from each other. In early December 2005, I observed members of Allan Alo's dance group rehearsing diligently, during his absence, for an upcoming performance at a hotel on another part of the island.¹⁸ I was surprised at how difficult it was to tell who was in charge. There was no



The Oceania Dance Theatre performing 'Woman' from the production *Va, The Broken Sinnets* in 2004. From left to right: Sinu Naulumatua, Ateca Ravuvu, Ane Ester

Choreographer: Allan Alo / Image courtesy: Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific, Fiji / Photograph: Ann Tarte

single individual shouting out commands or lording it over the others. Yet they were focused and serious, like true professionals. Later, I discovered that these dancers are paid for doing what they love to do, which partly explains their motivation for excellence. As paid dancers, they are motivated to rehearse regularly, keep fit and perfect their technique. Since the amount each dancer receives at a performance varies depending on the venue, the takings at the box office as well as the extent of participation, there is added reason for total commitment. Several of the dancers even left their academic programs at USP to dance full-time for Alo.¹⁹

Hau'ofa's hope for a centre that brings the diverse peoples of Oceania together is reflected in its present home, which he describes as 'conducive to creativity, an environment that people would find relaxing and welcoming'.²⁰ As a Tongan rooted in his culture, but who has lived in different parts of the Pacific (he also speaks several Pacific languages), Hau'ofa infuses the centre with a Pacific sensibility and world-view that motivates the artists in his care. For example, Hau'ofa correctly observes that 'In Oceanic societies, we prefer to do things with enjoyment, mixing work and pleasure shamelessly'.²¹ At his centre, he practices what he preaches.

Hau'ofa's group of artists spend a lot of time together. For instance, when I was there, I joined everyone (including the Director, the program assistant, and the cleaner) for a picnic at the beach. It looked very much like a big happy family having a great time: swimming, barbequing, laughing, playing soccer, lying around and telling stories. It was an end-of-year celebration and yet there was no drunkenness, fighting or evidence that this diverse group of artists from different parts of the vast Pacific did not

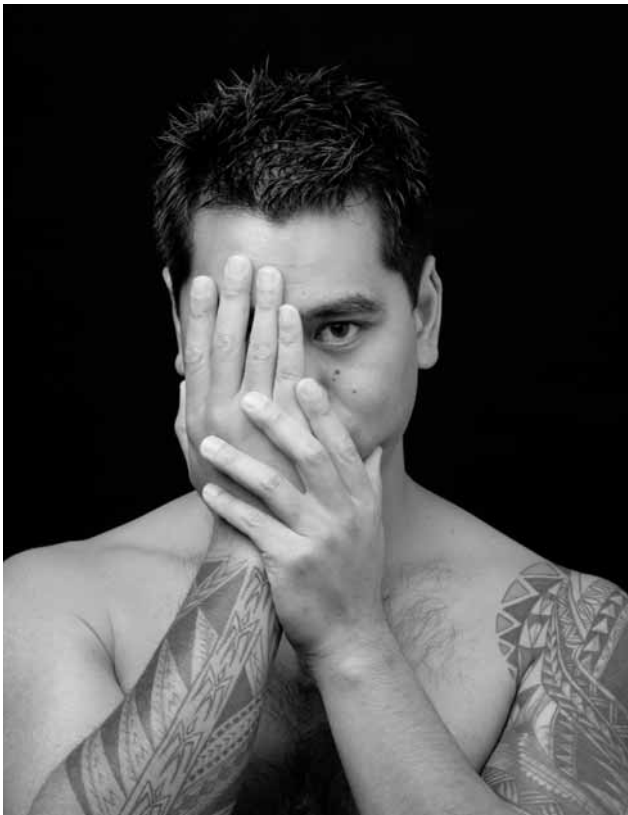
get along. In previous years, the university has had bad publicity about ethnic tensions on campus that sometimes culminated in bloody brawls among the different ethnic groups. It was refreshing to see evidence to the contrary.

On one of my day-time visits, I saw seven dancers in tights, shorts and T-shirts rehearsing on a raised wooden stage in full view of the public. Nearby, two sculptors chipped away at their wood while holding a conversation with the part-time cleaner who was lying on the floor listening to and observing them. Nearby, out of sight of the dancers, the musicians and the painters were telling stories and laughing. Hau'ofa rightly views such 'noisy openness with very little privacy' as an important aspect of community life in Oceania.²² With painters, sculptors, dancers, musicians and visitors interacting harmoniously, the centre has become a safe haven for all kinds of aspiring artists. Indeed, it is a space where 'lost relatives' can be found; on arrival, they are sometimes greeted with a welcome bowl of kava.

Unlike the vast majority of art and culture programs in the Western world that are enclosed in air-conditioned buildings, the centre is an open space where anyone can wander in at anytime, uninvited and unannounced. Again, lack of money is a blessing; had the centre been endowed with millions of dollars at its inception, one would have to make an appointment to see its Director. Instead, one can see him and his students at work and play from the main road that winds its way around the campus. The dancers also rehearse in full view of the general public and the art exhibitions enjoy the same visibility. As Hau'ofa points out, it is

Minoi 1999 was choreographed by Neil Ieremia and premiered at the Spiegel Tent, Auckland, New Zealand in 1999

Image courtesy: Black Grace Dance Company / Photograph: Scott Venning



Neil Ieremia, Artistic Director of Black Grace Dance Company

Image courtesy: Black Grace Dance Company / Photograph: John McDermott



a space that is 'free in an increasingly managed and controlled world'.²³ In this kind of space, where freedom reigns and everyone is treated as equal regardless of ethnicity, race, economic status, class and sexual orientation, it becomes possible to create new dances that are free of the shackles of our past, our racial prejudices and our fears of criticism.

Dance at Te Papa / At the first academic conference on Pacific dance, held at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, more than a dozen dance groups from various parts of Oceania provided attendees with an overview of the present status of dance in Oceania. Titled 'Culture Moves! Dance in Oceania from Hiva to Hip Hop', this conference assembled dance groups that normally perform separately in different venues for different audiences. It also attracted 'choreographers, dancers, composers, curators, costume makers, scholars, writers, musicians and artists to participate in a discussion on the knowledge and practice of dance in Oceania across cultural, national, academic and aesthetic boundaries'.²⁴ The conveners — Katerina Martina Teaiwa of the University of Hawai'i, April K Henderson of Victoria University, Wellington, and Sean Mellon of Te Papa Tongarewa — used every effort to be inclusive of all kinds of dance, and left one wishing that the Festival of Pacific Arts would do the same when it holds its next festival in American Samoa in 2008. It is important that what we see on stage reflects actual contemporary dance practices; to give the impression that all young people in the Pacific are interested only in performing their traditional dances is burying our collective heads in the sand. Hopefully, the example that has been modelled at this conference

will bring about changes in the wider community's perception of the wide-ranging nature of dance forms in the contemporary Pacific and lead to better appreciation of non-traditional dance genres.²⁵

While the most internationally successful dance company, Black Grace, did not perform, its director, Neil Ieremia, was a participant at one of the panels in which he expounded on his group's philosophy. A video of this company satisfied the curiosity of conference goers who had not seen their live performances. Like the Oceania Dance Theatre, this dance ensemble is multicultural, although it consists primarily of Polynesian men. Recently, it has added some women performers who have broadened its repertoire of dances. I attended a Black Grace performance at Leeward Community College in Hawai'i in 2005, and witnessed a full house rise to their feet in adoration and to cheer for more. I left the theatre feeling awed by the brilliant choreography and the physical stamina of its dancers.

An advantage of having so many groups perform dances that ranged from traditional to contemporary to hip-hop is that the best dancers and the best dance groups become evident. Pacific audiences are not shy to express their emotions, particularly when watching their own people on stage. When there is little applause or clapping, no shouts or shrieks of delight, it means we are not impressed. The reverse means we are having a great time being entertained, and we are appreciative of the hard work that went into preparation. At Te Papa, audience reactions varied, acting as a barometer on the quality of the performers on stage. Some groups were better prepared than others; some better costumed; others better choreographed. As a dance ensemble, the Oceania Dance Theatre best



Micronesian dancers at the Festival of Pacific Arts, Palau, 2004
Queensland Art Gallery Image Archive

embodied the contemporary spirit of Oceania. As usual, Alo's choreography was inventive. It was familiar because we recognise influences from established dance traditions, yet unfamiliar in its final interpretation into dance movement. The music, costuming and storyline are contemporary, original and bold, if not defiant. For example, the performance I saw began with a Fijian woman clad in a green sari, her bellybutton and midriff showing, poised like a dancing Shiva with her arms outstretched and her eyes gleaming like jewels. By collapsing Fijian and Indian identities into one, this image challenged me to see Fiji with fresh eyes, and to hope for a future in which Fijians and Indians live together in peace and harmony.²⁶

Conclusion / True artists need freedom to create, to produce something new or different, something that has never been performed before. To insist artists should only work within the narrow confines of their own ethnicity or culture is to stunt their creative talents. Although one can be creative within the tiny box we call traditional dance, for those whose experience is multicultural, this box is too limiting. So far, Hau'ofa has been successful in keeping the Centre free of institutional constraints. This freedom energises and motivates its dance director–choreographer and other artists from diverse and varied backgrounds to be innovative; they are limited only by their imagination.

Their cultural backgrounds may inform or inspire their dance movements, lyrics, music and storylines, but the dancers at the Oceania Centre are not stuck in their ethnic or racial boxes. Instead, they draw from any and all sources available to them. An Indian can perform a Fijian

dance; a Fijian can perform an Indian dance; a Caucasian can perform them all.²⁷ Ethnicity or race is not as important as whether or not one can dance, and dance well. Moreover, the dance movements are not necessarily traditional; quite often they merely hint at their cultural origins. This melding of dance traditions and genres performed by a talented group of energetic Oceanians has become the defining characteristic of the Oceania Dance Theatre.

A culture of freedom, of the kind advocated by Jackson and Hau'ofa, exists at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture at USP, at least at the time of writing.²⁸ As the years go by and the Oceania Dance Theatre becomes more secure and innovative, its reputation for producing works of incredible beauty and power will spread beyond the Pacific to the rest of the world. And when we watch its members dancing with passion and grace, we'll be transported to other realms and other worlds we can only dream about now.

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Allan Alo, Director and choreographer for the Oceania Dance Theatre, performing the dance drama *Va, The Broken Sinnets* at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, Fiji in 2004. The character represented is *Aitu o le Aoa* (Guardian spirit of the forest)

Image courtesy: Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific, Fiji / Photograph: Ann Tarte



Papua New Guinean performers at the Festival of Pacific Arts, Palau, 2004
Queensland Art Gallery Image Archive

DANCING OCEANIA

I wish to thank David Hanlon, Director of the Center for Pacific Islands Studies, for funds that allowed me to attend the Dance conference and carry out research. I am also grateful to Epeli Hau'ofa as well for my brief stint at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture. This paper has benefited from the comments of Jane Moulin and Katerina Teaiwa.

1 There have been recent developments in the Hawaii dance scene that are worthy of mention here. In particular, the *Holo Mai Pele* productions led by the Kanahele sisters; innovative choreography of the Tau Dance Theatre, led by Peter Rockford Espiritu, which draws from Western as well as traditional Hawaiian dance movements; and Patrick Makuakane's *halau, Na Lei Hulu I Ka Wekiu*. Tau Dance Theatre has collaborated with the Kanahele sisters and their *halau* in the past, producing dance movements and music that were fresh and energetic, while Makuakane's San Francisco *halau* has the potential to be the best contemporary dance group in the

United States. Their brilliant *The Natives are Restless* 2000 comes closest to the kind of productions that the Oceania Dance Theatre have produced in the last five years — in terms of dramatic style and generous borrowing from different dance and music traditions.

- 2 Jane Moulin, 'What's mine is yours? Cultural borrowing in a Pacific context', *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol.8, no.1, 1996, pp.128–153. Moulin discusses cultural borrowing among the Cook Islands, Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands, and how protective each of these cultures can be about what they see as their unique dances or music.
- 3 Moana Jackson, 'Reality, Identity, and the eating of M & Ms', paper given at a United Nations Global Seminar organised by the School of Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii, 19–22 March 2004.
- 4 Epeli Hau'ofa, 'Our place within: Foundations for a creative Oceania', keynote address at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa,

Wellington, 9–12 November 2005.

- 5 In 2006, a number of traditional dances (such as the hula) became acceptable in some Christian churches.
- 6 FLS Angas, *Polynesia: A Popular Description of the Islands of the Pacific*, Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, London, 1866, p.287.
- 7 William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches, During a Residence of Nearly Six Years in the South Sea Islands*, 1829, 2nd edn, Fisher, Son and Jackson, London, 1832–1834, p.219.
- 8 Another example is Pulapese dance, which the missionaries stopped in the late 1940s. See Juliana Flinn, 'Pulapese dance: Asserting identity and tradition in modern contexts', in *Pacific Studies*, vol.15, no.4, 1992, pp.57–66.
- 9 For example, imported fabric may be used as loincloth. See Flinn, p.58, where the author reports that the Pulapese want to appear 'part of modern Micronesia' rather than museum pieces. Flinn also makes the case that the Pulapese invoke tradition in the present for 'prestige, recognition, or power'. Also see Adrienne L. Kaeppler, 'Epilogue: States of the arts', *Pacific Studies*, vol.15, no.4, 1992, pp.311–318. Kaeppler uses the term 'evolved traditional' for art that has 'evolved along traditional lines, retaining its indigenous basic structure and sentiment'. She contrasts this with 'folk art' and 'airport art'. And see Karen Stevenson, "'Heiva": continuity and change of a Tahitian celebration', *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol.2, no.2, 1990, pp.255–78.
- 10 See Moulin, 'Oltobed a Malt (Nurture, Regenerate, Celebrate): The 9th Festival of Pacific Arts, Koror, Palau, 22–31 July 2004', *The Contemporary Pacific: A Journal of Island Affairs*, vol.17 no.2, 2005, pp.512–16. Also see Karen Nero, 'Introduction: Challenging communications in the contemporary Pacific', *Pacific Studies*, vol.15, no.4, 1992, pp.1–12. According to Nero, the festival was supposed to be held in New Caledonia in 1984 to coincide with Kanaky independence but the French government postponed the festival because of political unrest. It was held in Tahiti a year later.
- 11 See Moulin, 2005, p.515, for another account of how 'false breasts and buttocks' offended many Islanders. According to Moulin (personal communication with author, 2006), this quote refers to Taiwanese dancers who wore plastic buttocks and breasts under their costumes and then exposed them in a rather crude fashion. For a different perspective, see Glenn Petersen, 'Dancing defiance: The politics of Pohnpeian dance performances', *Pacific Studies*, vol.15, no.4, 1992, pp.13–28. Peterson reports that at the 1985 Festival of Pacific Arts in Tahiti, 'the Pohnpeian women, as well as the men, danced bare-breasted'. Upon their return, they reported that 'they were the only dancers to perform in true island style' and that viewers were enchanted.
- 12 Countries such as Tonga and Tuvalu are good examples.
- 13 For examples, see Moulin, 1996,

pp.128–53.

- 14 Hau'ofa, 'Our place within: Foundations for a creative Oceania', Forge Memorial Lecture, Australian National University, Canberra, 2003.
- 15 Pule was an artist-in-residence at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture at the beginning of 1998, a year after it opened.
- 16 See *Culture Moves! Dance in Oceania from hiva to hip hop: A Pacific Studies Conference* [program booklet], 9–12 November 2005, p.32, <www.hawaii.edu/opis/dance>, viewed 2006. In 2000, two performances were held at the Australian National University and at a conference organised by the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawaii. Titled *The Boiling Ocean*, this performance drew its inspiration from the political crises in Fiji and the Solomon Islands.
- 17 *Culture Moves!* [program booklet], p.26.
- 18 Alo had left already for Samoa since the University was in recess for the Christmas holiday.
- 19 Dance members, personal communication with author, December 2005.
- 20 Hau'ofa, 2003.
- 21 Hau'ofa, 2003.
- 22 Hau'ofa, 2003.
- 23 Hau'ofa, 2003.
- 24 *Culture Moves!* [program booklet], p.1.
- 25 See Moulin, 1996, pp.147–48, for a brief report on negative reactions to contemporary forms such as an emphasis on theatre groups and popular music stars at the Festival of Pacific Arts held in the Cook Islands in 1992. I am inclined to agree with Moulin that 'The new and the old can coexist in the Pacific as they do elsewhere — one does not threaten the other'.
- 26 See Petersen, pp.13–28, for a discussion on how dance and politics are closely linked on Pohnpei. Also see Dorothy K Billings, 'The theater of politics: Contrasting types of performance in Melanesia', *Pacific Studies*, vol.15, no.4, 1992, pp.211–33. Billings asserts that 'Without politics, art has no power; without art, politics has nowhere to go'.
- 27 At the Oceania Dance Theatre's performance at Te Papa Tongarewa, one of the dancers was Caucasian.
- 28 In December 2005, Hau'ofa expressed concern that some colleagues at the USP were advocating the attachment of the centre to another School or program. Once this happens, the centre will lose its autonomy and freedom, and Hau'ofa will have to contend with bureaucratic structures and their constraints.

ENDNOTES