

BLACK GRACE (New Zealand)
*Crying Men*THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2019 • 8PM
THE CLARICE SMITH PERFORMING ARTS CENTER**ABOUT THE PROGRAM***Notes from the Choreographer, Neil Ieremia:*

Kiona and the Little Bird Suite is a collection of traditionally inspired works and excerpts from our repertoire over the last two decades. It draws from works including *Relentless* (1996), *Fia Ola* (1998), *Surface* (2003), *Pati Pati* (2009), *Gathering Clouds* (2009) and *E Toa, E Toa* (2018). This work utilises body percussion influenced by traditional Samoan Sasa (seated dance) and Fa'ataupati (slap dance), and incorporates live drumming, singing and chanting.

The mixture of both live and recorded sound is an acknowledgement of the meeting place of the old and the new, the traditional and the contemporary. This work is an ode to my parents, Simanu and Kiona.

Music: Original music from *Surface* (2003), Neil Ieremia and Juse Live Drumming, Isitolo Alesana Kaleve, Te Vaka

Lighting Design: JAX Messenger

The creative process for *As Night Falls* started with news stories from around the world. I picked up online national and international newspapers, which led me to hours of documentaries and movies focussed on subjects including the cause of the Global Financial Crisis, the demise of democracy, racism in America and more. Locally, my view on various government policies and their impact on average New Zealanders became more pointed. I thought a lot about how individualism has become more prevalent while the notion of "community" as the heart of a democratic society seemed to have been stolen away from us, along with home ownership and tolerance. From these and other sources I took images and stories and started creating movement vocabulary forming compositional structures much like the layout of a broadsheet newspaper. These included pictures of broken bodies buried under the rubble after another airstrike, drowned and desperate refugees, terrorist attacks on innocent civilians, protests against police brutality, more natural disasters. I could feel myself being affected by the material I was working with. One image in particular haunted me, a father shielding his son in his arms, both killed beneath the rubble of a collapsed building during an airstrike. It simultaneously captured the best and worst of us. Initial rehearsals started during winter and although I chose not to share the concept in great detail with the dancers, I think we all felt the immense weight of the subject matter.

Music-wise, I listened to a range of artists including Vivaldi, Afrika Bambata, Bob Dylan, Public Enemy, Gareth Farr, Miles Davis, John Lee Hooker, John Psathas and the late David Bowie. I started working with multiple soundtracks in rehearsals. Somehow Vivaldi found a way in and stuck, I can't quite recall how this happened. It was around this time that I decided to focus on the hope.

While listening to some old gospel records I was reminded of some lyrics from an old Baptist hymn that I think best captures the spirit of this work: "... beauty for ashes, oil of joy for mourning, a garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness..."

As Night Falls is my very small exchange for some of the darkness that threatens to envelope us.

Music: *Progression for Hand Clap*, JPC Percussion Museum & Noriko Hisada
Concerto in G Minor for 2 Cellos, Strings and Basso continuo, RV 531
I. Allegro, Ton Koopman, Yo-Yo Ma, Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra & Jonathan Manson
Nisi Dominus, RV 608:
IV. Cum Dederit, Jean-Christophe Spinosi, Ensemble Matheus & Philippe Jaroussky
Concerto No. 8 in A Minor, RV 522:
I. Allegro, Berliner Philharmoniker, Daniel Stabrawa & Nigel Kennedy
The Four Seasons, Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, RV 315, Op. 8
No. 2 "Summer":
III. Presto, Berliner Philharmoniker & Nigel Kennedy
Concerto No. 8 in A Minor, RV 522:
III. Allegro, Berliner Philharmoniker, Daniel Stabrawa & Nigel Kennedy
Lighting Design: Bonnie Burrill adapted by JAX Messenger

Crying Men has recently premiered at the ASB Waterfront Theatre in Auckland. The seed for this work was planted in 2015 whilst talking with my cousin Dave about his experiences working with Pacific Island and Maori men serving prison sentences in the Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions. I was intrigued as he explained that inevitably at some point during the numerous meetings with prisoners, even the most hardened would cry; especially when talking about their upbringing and the moment their lives changed.

It made me curious about my own life and the lives of the men that shaped mine. I thought about my own behaviours and the patterns of masculinity ingrained in me, as well as my own aversion to crying. The words "crying" and "men" had up until this point been mutually exclusive in the culture and society of my youth and I suspect the same of that of my father's and his father before him.

Music: Original music by Anonymouz & Submariner
Redaction by Richard Nunns, Mark Lockett and Jeff Henderson
Narration: Nathaniel Lees
Lighting Design: JAX Messenger

Boyhood memories of backyard rugby games, bull rush and wrestling provided the basis for improvisational exercises from which *Method's* movement vocabulary was derived. The combination of these simple images and the music of J. S. Bach offer an interesting juxtaposition between the raw and refined.

Music: Brandenburg Concerto No.3:
II. Adagio, The New Zealand Guitar Quartet
III. Allegro assai
Original Lighting Design: Mark Burlace, adapted by JAX Messenger

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Black Grace is motivated to provide a different perspective and a fresh voice in the dance scene. Neil Ieremia founded the company in 1995 with ten male dancers of Pacific, Maori and New Zealand heritage. Drawing from his Samoan and New Zealand roots to create innovative dance works that reach across social, cultural and generational barriers, Ieremia has changed the face of contemporary dance in New Zealand and turned Black Grace into one of the most recognizable and iconic cultural brands.

Black Grace tours the length and breadth of New Zealand developing new audiences and a new appreciation for dance. The company's work itself is highly physical, rich in the story telling traditions of the South Pacific and expressed with raw finesse, unique beauty and power.

The Company features some of New Zealand's finest dancers and has toured internationally to Australia, Canada, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Japan, Luxembourg, Scotland, Mexico, South Korea, Taiwan and New Caledonia. In 2004, Black Grace made its USA debut, performing a sold out season at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, with a subsequent return to the Festival in 2005. Since then, the Company has performed regularly throughout North America earning audience and critical acclaim.

In 2009, Black Grace was presented with a resolution passed by the Guam Legislator in recognition of their work with local communities, and 2010 saw the Mayor of Honolulu officially proclaim Feb 6, 2010 as "Black Grace Day". Black Grace received a Herald Angel Award at the 2014 Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

ABOUT THE CREATIVE TEAM

Neil Ieremia is one of New Zealand's most accomplished choreographers, a creative entrepreneur and inspirational leader. Born in Wellington and of Samoan heritage, Ieremia was raised in a tough working-class neighbourhood in a country focused more on sporting prowess and agriculture rather than creative expression. At the age of 19 and with no formal training, Ieremia resigned from his banking job, left home, enrolled in a full time dance program and broke his parents' hearts.

As a freelance professional dancer, Ieremia worked with many leading New Zealand choreographers as well as creating a number of commissioned works before founding Black Grace in 1995. Numerous firsts for a New Zealand choreographer include sell-out performances at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival (USA debut 2004 and 2005), a four-week season on New York City's 42nd Street, performances at the renowned Cervantino Festival in Mexico, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the 2010 Cultural Olympiad in Vancouver.

Among his many other achievements, Ieremia has received a 2005 Arts Foundation of New Zealand Laureate Award and the 2009 Paul D. Fleck Fellowship in the Arts from The Banff Centre, Canada. In 2015, Ieremia received a City of Porirua Anniversary Award and the Senior Pacific Artist Award from Creative New Zealand. In 2016, Mr he was appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to dance and most recently was made an Honorary Member of Dance ICONS.

JAX Messenger maintains a successful career as a lighting professional. He has lit productions for such companies as Opera Philadelphia, Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, The Washington Ballet and San Francisco Opera. As an assistant lighting director, he has managed the creation of four operas for New York City Opera and 48 operas for San Francisco Opera. As a lighting supervisor, he has produced tours for Black Grace, The Washington Ballet and Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo in hundreds of venues around the world.

Of Samoan and Tokelauan descent, **Isitolo Alesana** was born in Lower Hutt, New Zealand. Alesana is a master traditional drummer and a 2006 graduate of Whitireia Polytechnic. He has travelled extensively throughout Europe, Australia, Asia, North America and Samoa, accompanying multiple cultural groups from New Zealand. Isitolo first worked with Black Grace in 2018, accompanying *E Toa, E Toa* in the Black Grace + Friends season in Porirua, Wellington.

Abby Ieremia performed in Black Grace's youth dance project UrbanYOUTHMovement in 2002 and made her professional debut with the company in 2003 for the premiere season of *Surface*. She has performed extensively with Black Grace throughout New Zealand, as well as on various international tours to North America, Europe, Asia, Mexico, Australia and New Caledonia. Ieremia has worked as the Rehearsal Director since 2007 and is also the company's Producer, leading major performance programs and international touring.

ABOUT THE DANCERS

Sarah Baron is a 2007 graduate of the New Zealand School of Dance and attended the 2007 Cultural Traditions Program at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, directed by Neil Ieremia. Baron joined Black Grace in 2011 for the national tour of *Verses* and has since then performed in the debut seasons of *Vaka*, *Xmas Verses* and *As Night Falls*, and enjoyed touring extensively to Europe, North America and South Korea. Baron is currently studying towards her Masters in Dance Studies at the University of Auckland.

Of Tongan and German descent, **James Wasmer** returned to New Zealand from Germany to study Commerce at the University of Auckland. A change of heart took him to the New Zealand School of Dance where he studied Contemporary Dance before joining Black Grace in 2014, performing on international tours to Scotland, South Korea and the USA. James completed his Bachelor of Commerce in 2016 and was Assistant Producer of Black Grace's 20th Anniversary season *Siva*. James has managed Black Grace since late 2016.

Of Filipino and Malaysian heritage, **Demi-Jo Manalo** is originally from Australia and graduated from the New Zealand School of Dance in 2015 with a Diploma in Dance Performance. Manalo made her professional debut touring with Black Grace to France and the Netherlands in 2016, performing in *Human Language*, *Mother Mother* and *Gathering Clouds*. Manalo has also performed in *Another Letter from Earth*, *As Night Falls* and *Crying Men*, touring with the company to Taiwan, the United States and throughout New Zealand.

A New Zealand born Samoan, **Shane Tofaeono** was raised in Te Puke, New Zealand and discovered his passion for dance at high school before moving to Auckland to study towards a Bachelor in Performing and Screen Arts majoring in Contemporary Dance at Unitec. Tofaeono joined Black Grace in 2016 for an international tour to France and the Netherlands, and has performed in *Another Letter from Earth*, *As Night Falls* and *Crying Men*. Tofaeono has also toured with the company throughout the United States and on a 20-center tour of New Zealand.

Of Samoan descent, **Rodney Tyrell** grew up in West Auckland and first discovered dance as a teenager, partaking in cultural performances and hip hop. Tyrell studied dance at Unitec, graduating with a Bachelor in Performing and Screen Arts majoring in Contemporary Dance in 2015. He made his professional debut on an international tour with Black Grace to the United States of America in 2017. Tyrell has performed in *As Night Falls*, *Pati Pati*, *Mother Mother* and *Crying Men*.

Of Cook Island and Maori heritage, **Keana Ngaata (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Apa)** grew up in Wellington and moved to Auckland to study at Unitec, graduating in 2017 with a Bachelor of Performing and Screen Arts majoring in Contemporary Dance. Ngaata worked with Atamira Dance Company before joining Black Grace in 2018 for the debut season of *Crying Men*. Since then, Keana has performed in Black Grace + Friends in Porirua, travelled with the Company to New York City, as well as 20for20, a 20-center tour of New Zealand.

Sina-Lorelie Esera is of Samoan and Swedish descent, born and raised in Porirua, New Zealand. Discovering her love for performing arts at church, she is a recent graduate of Whitireia, where she received a Bachelor of Creativity (Performing Arts). Esera made her professional debut with Black Grace in 2018, performing in the premiere season of *Crying Men*. She was also involved in the creative workshops for *E Toa, E Toa*, which was included in the 2018 season of Black Grace + Friends in Wellington and showcased in New York City.

Of Samoan descent, **Petesa Maea** is a recent graduate of Whitireia, receiving a Bachelor of Creativity (Performing Arts). During her studies, she performed in France as a vocalist and dancer. She has worked with New Zealand-based group Le Moana and performed in the World of Wearable Arts in Wellington. Maea interned with Black Grace in 2018 during creative workshops for *Crying Men* and joined the Company to showcase *E Toa, E Toa* in New York City, early 2019.

A New Zealand born Tongan, **Sione Fataua** is from Christchurch and discovered dance at the age of 18 during high school. Moving to Auckland to pursue his newfound passion, Fataua studied at Unitec, graduating in 2015 with a Bachelor of Performing Arts. After freelance dancing for various New Zealand choreographers, he will make his debut with Black Grace on this international tour to the United States.

Born in the Philippines, **Fenjay Sapon** began learning hip-hop from a young age before discovering contemporary dance in high school. He is a 2017 graduate of Unitec Institute of Technology in Auckland, achieving a Bachelor of Performing and Screen Arts majoring in Contemporary Dance. He has previously worked with Atamira Dance Company and this tour of the United States marks his debut performances with Black Grace.

