

KAHURANGI

Art Form: Music
Style: Traditional
Culture: Maori

MEET THE ARTIST:

There is a Maori proverb that says, "*Whatungarongaro he tangata toi tu nga mahi o nga tipuna*"-- *People pass away but our heritage lives on forever and ever.* The **Kahurangi Maori Dance Theatre**, founded by *Tama Huata*, preserves this vibrant legacy. It was established in 1984 in Hastings, New Zealand, in an attempt to revitalize the *ihi*, or life force of Maori culture, and to provide cultural, educational and employment opportunities for young Maori people. Kahurangi, meaning "a clock from Heaven," has performed thousands of concerts in seven different countries.

Members of the company are expected to complete a minimum training period of six months. Performers take classes in vocal training, acting and improvisation, *waanaga* (traditional spiritual and cultural training), aerobics, and both traditional and contemporary Maori song and dance.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Kahurangi brings the heritage of the Maori people and other tribes of Polynesia to life with vivid presentations of music and dance. Wearing handcrafted costumes featuring the traditional Maori colors of red (from berries), yellow (from clay) and black (from mud), the dancers present selections from the company repertoire. They also reflect the choreographic and musical heritage of other Polynesian Island nations such as Tahiti, Hawaii, and Samoa. Thoughtful narration provides fascinating cultural, geographic, historical and social background. For example, in some of the dances the Maori express their beliefs by shaking the hands to symbolize the trembling of life within the heart, while the stomping of the feet conveys the heartbeat of Mother Earth. Some dances express the warlike aggression that reflects their warrior heritage. They do not smile during chants and war dances, but extend their tongues to represent defiance and to ridicule an enemy. This tongue gesture is also made in welcoming ceremonies because they believe that if a visitor is truly friendly he will not react with anger. The program is laced with captivating information about the cultures.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Some scholars say the Polynesian peoples originated in Asia, while others claim that they came from the Americas. But it is known that many centuries ago, the Polynesians shared a common heritage, language and customs. The legends recall an ancestral homeland from which adventurous people sailed their open canoes across the vast, blue Pacific Ocean. Two thousand years before Columbus set foot in America, these daring sailors migrated to new lands using wave motion, wind, and the stars to navigate from island to island. Some set sail to seek adventure, but many were driven in their search for a new home by tribal conflict or a shortage of land due to overpopulation. The islands they inhabit today are known collectively as "Polynesia," a combination of two Greek words meaning "many islands." These islands include Tonga, Samoa, the Hawaiian Islands, Tokelau, Rotuman, Easter Island, Tahiti, Rarotonga, the Cook Islands and New Zealand.

The Maori people of New Zealand number approximately 300,000 or ten percent of the national population. Although the Maori are migrants to the country, settling in New Zealand around 900-1150 AD, they are regarded as the native people of the land. Their new land, however, brought a radical change in lifestyle because they came from a warm, tropical climate and had to adapt to the cold climate, isolation and different food sources of New Zealand.

Abel Tasman, a Dutch navigator, named New Zealand and sketched sections of the islands' west coast. English captain James Cook thoroughly explored the coastline during three South Pacific voyages beginning in 1769. In 1840, the United Kingdom annexed New Zealand and encouraged groups from England to colonize. The Maori resisted, but were defeated in the 1860s. In 1890 a democratic-based, parliamentary government was set up; by 1907 it was declared a dominion by royal decree, but achieved autonomy in 1947.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Ask students to recall the performance and make a list on the board of what they remembered.
- Discuss the dances and music with students. What specific things impressed them about the dances?
- What type of instruments created the music? What made the music unique and different from the music they listen to?
- What were some of the beliefs of the Polynesians? How do these beliefs relate to their music and dance? What most surprised you about their customs?
- Describe the costumes, the three significant colors and with what each is associated.
- Have any students visited any of the Polynesian islands or have Polynesian heritage? If so, ask them to share some of their experiences or knowledge of the cultures.

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - SOCIAL STUDIES:

Tattoos have been an important aspect of many cultures and usually have symbolic significance. Have students recall the tattoos on the faces of the dancers and describe their designs. In former days, the right for a Maori to tattoo was granted only to hereditary chiefs, appointed leaders, priests, and those who distinguished themselves in a particular skill. Each line and spiral of a tattoo had a meaning that reflected rank, genealogy, skill specialty and personal achievements. The overall design on the face and torso became an individual's unique signature.

Many cultures have special designs that reflect ownership or heritage. Some countries in Europe have family crests and heraldry that help identify their pedigree. Clans in Scotland are represented by different patterns in their kilts. In the American West, cattle are branded with the symbols of their owners. American Indians identified their tribes with totems and some decorated their faces and bodies for war. Today, people tattoo personal symbols and stories on their bodies. Ask students to create a line drawing or design that represents their own unique capabilities, qualities or heritage. They can select colors that are connected to specific meanings, or that describe the significance of their tattoo drawing.

- Legend:
- Artistic perception
 - ❖ Creative expression
 - ▶ Historical & cultural context
 - ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
 - * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ❖ After discussing the performance, ask students to select one aspect of the performance and write a paragraph describing it with great detail. Ask them to incorporate the story, history or other background information that relates.
- ❖❖ Ask students to design their own island nation. They should decide where on the planet it will be located and then do some research to determine the temperature, foods that grow there, topography, etc. They should name their island, design a flag, and choose the animals and plants that would most likely inhabit the island. What kinds of people would live there? Describe some of their traditions. What type of clothes do they wear? What do they eat? What kind of jobs would people have? What types of instruments, music and dances would express the culture? What would they use for money or trade? Share this project with others.
- ▶ Locate the Polynesian islands on a map or globe. Specifically identify the following islands: Tonga, Samoa, the Hawaiian Islands, Tokelau, Rotuman, Easter Island, Tahiti, and New Zealand. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of living on an island and how this compares to living on the United States mainland.
- ⇒ Discuss the following Maori proverb:
"Whatungarongaro he tangata toi tu nga mahi o nga tipuna"
-- People pass away but our heritage lives on forever and ever.



Give reasons why you agree or disagree with this thought.

BIBLIOGRAPHY/WEBLINKS:

Main Maori Web Site: maori.org.nz.
Also, <http://www.culture.co.nz/>
King, Michael. *Maori - A Photographic and Social History*. Sold by Flying Pig.
Nileman, Hans. *Moko: Maori Tattoos*.
ISBN: 3908161967. 1999. Amazon.com.
Maori catalog listings at Reed Publishing (NZ).
Amazon.com.