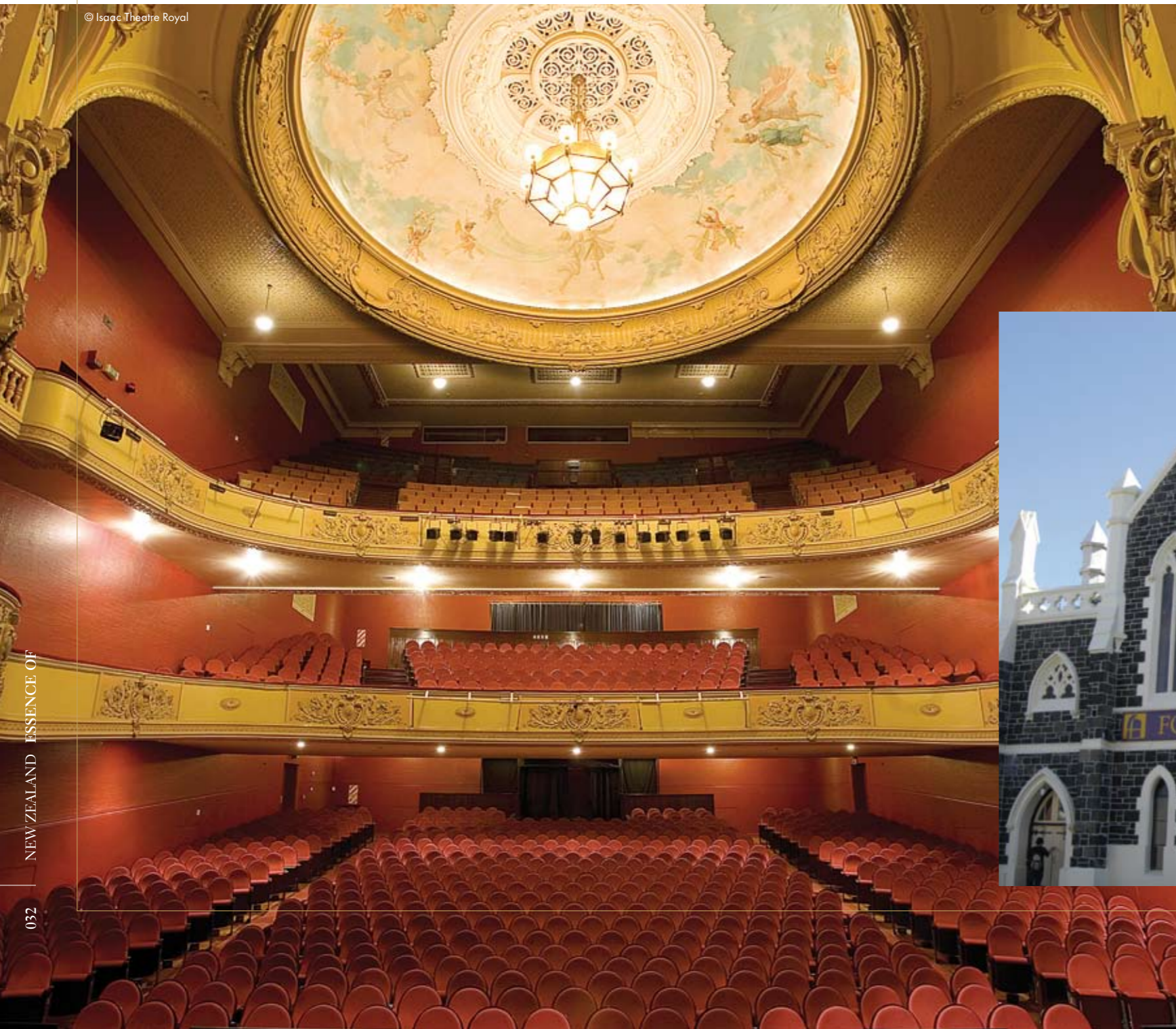


Art AND culture

The art and cultural output of the world's youngest country, New Zealand, is no less exciting than its world-renowned geographic wonders, as **Lauren Rosewarne** discovers.



© Isaac Theatre Royal

Janice Marthen

MANAGER, FORTUNE THEATRE,
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What makes the contemporary theatre scene in New Zealand so unique?

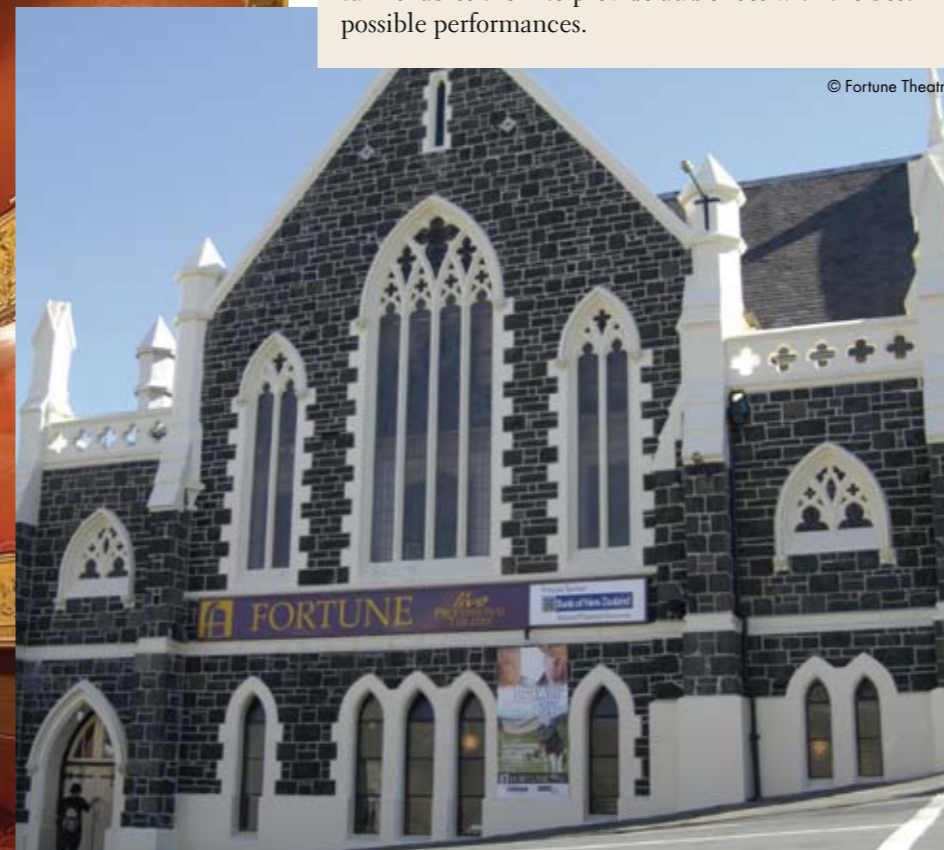
The culture of New Zealand's Maori people affects the language, the arts and even the accents of all New Zealanders. The influence of Maori, Pacific Island, European and Asian cultures makes the arts in New Zealand colourful, unique and vibrant.

What have been the most significant developments in theatre in New Zealand over the last decade?

The last decade has seen the development of Pasifika and Asian theatre, and the growth of multiple theatrical styles in New Zealand. This period has also seen the growth of plays with a Maori or bicultural perspective.

What contribution does the Fortune Theatre make to New Zealand's theatre scene?

Theatre is a collaborative art form and we offer opportunities for directors, writers and actors to develop their craft while collaborating with our theatre. We recognise that if theatre is to continue to evolve and retain its relevance and quality, practitioners need to be skilled, motivated and have access to opportunities for continuing professional development. We offer artists a welcoming and supportive environment, which in turn enables them to provide audiences with the best possible performances.



© Fortune Theatre

THEATRE

For a country that gifted soprano Dame Kiri Te Kanawa to the world, it comes as no surprise that New Zealand boasts a vibrant opera scene. More surprising, however, is the scope of the country's performing arts culture that impressively encompasses ballet and music theatre, comedy and drama, and each genre in between.

Auckland

The Aotea Centre is New Zealand's largest performing arts venue, home to both the 186-seat Herald Theatre and the 2256-seat ASB Auditorium. In 2010 the Centre hosts a ballet production of the opera *Carmen* (July).

The spectacular Civic Theatre is another Auckland landmark, originally built as a cinema in 1929 and surviving as one of only seven 'atmospheric theatres' – the only one outside of North America. The auditorium's ceiling gives the illusion of a twinkling night sky. In 2010 the Civic will host the Royal New Zealand Ballet's production of *The Nutcracker* (December). Another Auckland performing arts gem is the 700-seat SkyCity Theatre, home of the New Zealand International Comedy Festival and the Auckland International Film Festival.

Christchurch

Housed in a fully restored Edwardian building, the Isaac Theatre Royal seats more than 1260 people and is as famous for its French Renaissance architecture as its stellar live performances.

Founded in 1971, the Court Theatre contributes equally to the city's vibrant theatre scene, hosting local and international productions and being best known for its weekly Scared Scriptless improvisation show.

Dunedin

A Gothic-styled Wesleyan church is home to the Fortune Theatre, the world's southernmost theatre company. Fortune claims to be haunted, however, less contested is the World War II bunker contained within.

The Regent Theatre, modelled on its New York theatre namesake, equally fuses historical significance with the arts. Built in 1928 on the site of Dunedin's most devastating fire, today the Regent hosts a broad range of live performances.

Wellington

First opened in 1912, the Edwardian-style St James Theatre stealthily avoided demolition in the 1980s and was treated to a multimillion-dollar renovation, reopening in 1998. The theatre is home to the Royal New Zealand Ballet Company and a handful of theatre ghosts, notably Yuri, a Russian performer who supposedly fell from the stage to his death. The Theatre's 2010 program includes a production of *Miss Saigon* (April). Boasting a less haunting past, the Downstage Theatre, established in 1964, is a 250-seat venue that is home to the country's longest running theatre company.

For experimental and developmental theatre, the BATS Theatre is a 1930s venue that has long operated with a mission of fostering innovation and keeping ticket prices competitive.

Performers at the Polynesian Cultural Center.
© S Uchan



MUSIC

From rock bands like Split Enz, Crowded House and The Datsuns, to bass baritone Inia Te Wiata and sopranos like Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and Hayley Westenra, a host of New Zealanders have made their mark on the international music scene.

Classical

Dame Kiri Te Kanawa catapulted to worldwide stardom after performing at the 1981 wedding of Prince Charles and Princess Diana. Dame Kiri aside, New Zealand has bred some superb classical talents, notably Generation Y soprano, Hayley Westenra, whose 2003 album *Pure* became the fastest selling international classical debut of its time. New Zealand's commitment to classical music is perfectly illustrated at the Auckland Town Hall: its Grand Hall was modelled on the Gewandhaus Concert Hall in Germany and is considered one of the world's finest classical music venues.

Contemporary

Formed in the 1970s, Split Enz – incorporating the sounds of rock, punk and pop – was one of the first New Zealand bands to achieve international acclaim; their 1980s song 'I Got You' put the band on many international charts. More recently Evermore, hailing from the North Island town of Feilding, is an indie rock outfit scheduled to support pop star Pink's upcoming European tour.

“The Maoris are the Indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand and music plays an integral part of their culture.”

Maori musical culture

The Maoris are the Indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand and music plays an integral part of their culture. Their musical style is a fusion of poetry, speech and song that incorporates hand carved instruments including flutes and, in more contemporary incarnations, guitars. A traditional Maori performance is *kapa haka*, more commonly known as the haka, which is a blend of song and dance characterised by feet stomping, bulging eyes, outstretched tongues and rhythmic shouting. Historically significant, Maori music styles are also incorporated into the repertoire of contemporary bands including Wellington's Fat Freddy's Drop and Te Vaka, an Oceanic ensemble describing their sound as 'South Pacific fusion'.



© Christchurch Art Gallery

ART

From classical to contemporary, Indigenous to international, the New Zealand art scene thoroughly spoils even the most hard-nosed of critics. From quaint boutique spaces to sprawling galleries, New Zealand has plenty to offer.

Auckland

The Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki is the largest art institution in New Zealand and boasts an expansive national and international collection. In the heart of Auckland lies the MIC Toi Rerehiko, offering a continual program of film, video, digital media, music, and live performance. A number of city hotels also boast impressive local and Indigenous art collections, notably the Great Ponsonby Art Hotel, the Regency-style mansion of Cotter House, and Auckland's newest luxury accommodation, the Westin.

Christchurch

The Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu is the largest art institution on the South Island, boasting more than 5500 pieces, including paintings, sculpture, textiles and metalwork. In 2010 the Gallery welcomes exhibitions like *Provocations*, which spotlights the photography of New Zealand/UK artist Christine Webster (March to June). Contemporary art is also well-represented in Christchurch; the Centre of Contemporary Art displays the work of more than 400 cutting edge artists annually.

Private galleries in town include the Bryce Gallery in Riccarton, which focuses on contemporary art, and the Jonathan Smart Gallery, which specialises in photography, sculpture and film.

Dunedin

The Dunedin Public Art Gallery is one of New Zealand's four major art museums, showcasing works by Monet, Pissarro, Gainsborough and Turner. Dunedin's stellar private galleries include the Quadrant, which specialises in contemporary jewellery and sculpture, and the Moray Gallery, focusing on glass and ceramics.

Wellington

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa is one of the world's largest national museums and focuses on five genres: art, history, Pacific, Maori and natural environment. Equally well-regarded is the City Gallery Wellington, which opened in 1980 and specialises in contemporary visual arts, architecture and design. Wellington also offers a number of internationally reputed private galleries, notably Emerge with its glass, jewellery and sculpture displays and Photospace, which is dedicated to local photography. In 2010, the artist-run, Enjoy Public Art Gallery is hosting New York-based artist and writer Gregory Sholette in residence.

“Te Papa, the national museum in Wellington, also boasts impressive Maori cultural displays, notably the Mana Whenua permanent exhibition, which offers a mix of *taonga*, oral histories and contemporary art.”

MAORI CULTURE

No visit to New Zealand would be complete without a thorough immersion in the art and culture of the nation's Indigenous people.

Rotorua lies on the Bay of Plenty on the North Island and is widely considered as the home of Maori culture. In 1886 the region's Mount Tarawera volcano erupted and killed more than 100 people. Today the excavated village offers visitors an intimate look at this natural disaster and the culture of the inhabitants that were affected.

Overlooking the Bay of Islands on the North Island, the Waitangi Treaty Grounds are remembered as the location where the Treaty of Waitangi was signed between the Maoris and the British Crown in 1840. The Treaty Grounds offer a number of important glimpses into Maori culture including Ngātōkīmatawhaorua, one of the world's largest Maori ceremonial war canoes and Te Whare Runanga, a carved Maori meeting house.

New Zealand's museums have also played an integral role in helping preserve and display Maori culture. Established in 1852, the Auckland War Memorial Museum, for example, was New Zealand's first museum with dedicated Maori galleries and today boasts the world's most comprehensive collection of Maori *taonga* (treasures). The galleries contain the earliest surviving Maori carvings and include an impressive collection of fibre work including elaborate *kaitakas* (Maori cloaks), as well as hunting and fishing tools. Te Papa, the national museum in Wellington, also boasts impressive Maori cultural displays, notably the Mana Whenua permanent exhibition, which offers a mix of *taonga*, oral histories and contemporary art. ■

Rachael Slade

ART CONSULTANT, CENTRE OF CONTEMPORARY ART (COCA), CHRISTCHURCH



Tell us a bit about New Zealand's contemporary art scene.

New Zealand's distance from international art centres has meant the development of a distinctly New Zealand aesthetic that is influenced by a pride in our cultural and physical environments. Our visionary attitude and internationally emerging status means that artists are not hesitant in forging new practices and confronting traditions, which in turn invites active consideration and debate that results in a lively national art scene.

What have been some of the most significant developments for art in New Zealand?

There has been quite an obvious shift in interest from historic to contemporary art practice in the national art community. Institutions, curators and collectors have increasingly supported contemporary art practice and the resulting buoyancy has encouraged artists to push the boundaries of past rituals and aesthetics.

What contribution does COCA make to New Zealand's art scene?

For almost 130 years COCA has acted as one of New Zealand's most significant arts institutions. COCA provides ongoing support, promotion and exhibition of established and emerging artists, as well as adding to and maintaining a permanent collection. The gallery holds more than 60 exhibitions each year with a commitment to the work of contemporary artists.



Pou tokomanawa, Tei Te Papa Art of the Nation. © Te Papa