

# Tihei Mauri Ora Live! May 26<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> 2017 at Tauhara Centre, Taupo by Arjuna

My second Tihei Mauri Ora weekend in Aotearoa – the land of the long white cloud was a profound experience of singing, dancing, playing music and communing with both the people and the country.



This artwork in the common room at the Tauhara Centre symbolizes my experience. The words are a Maori proverb: 'Forever flows the spirit connecting all creation.' And that was the feeling with which I came away from the weekend. This seems like a very indigenous understanding of creation, like the Native American Mitákuye Oyás'ij (All Are Related) - a phrase from the Lakota language.

When our dear Khannah and I attended the first Tihei Mauri Ora some 10 years ago, we spoke about the need to include local indigenous dances in our Australian dance repertoire. We both felt the lack of acknowledgement of our own Australian Aboriginal people

that we wanted to address. Well, last night Karen and I were able to lead an evening of dances on the theme of *Connecting with our Indigenous Ancestors*, that included 4 Maori inspired dances, 1 Native American inspired dances and an Aboriginal dance that has been gifted to our community by Uncle Noel Butler, a Budawang elder from the South Coast of NSW, and his family. This was especially significant as it was the last day of the Reconciliation Week in Australia, which was celebrating the 50 years of the referendum in 1967 when Aboriginal people were finally acknowledged to exist, and 25 years since the historic Mabo decision, which recognised Native Title. Clearly our vision of making this connection has been fulfilled with 3 Spring Renewals at Jamanee Gunya (and the next planned for there too) and 2 Aboriginal dances in our repertoire.

Returning to NZ for a second time this year, I felt like it had become my second home. I felt so embraced and welcomed by Shafia and the NZ dance community. The intention of the weekend was to record the Maori inspired dances that Shafia and Wendy had brought through so that people had a reference as to how they were intended to be, by their creators. The weekend began with the creation dance Te Kore, with its exploration of the many layers of the void, the darkness and the night that preceded creation. The story behind this dance represents the genealogy of the world. We were also invited to introduce ourselves and our reasons for coming. This established a sense of community, which I find is so strong in NZ.

Over the weekend we greeted Papatuanuku and Ranginui, the Earth Mother and Sky Father of the Maori tradition; we celebrated the strength and presence of Tane Mahuta, the Lord of the forest; we explored the long fires burning in Ahikaaroa; and the softness and flow of the sacred river in He Awa Tapu and paddled our wakas around the dance space of the Tauhara Centre in To Tatou Waka. We heard the calling of Haere Mai, and were caressed by the lullaby of A, I, O. There was a real sense of deepening for me in this experience of dances that I've now been dancing and in some cases leading for a few years. The Kotahi Tonu finally imprinted itself on my memory so I could lead it last night in the Quaker Hall. I've always loved this dance but it's taken many years before it allowed me to lead it.



Shafia and Sally demonstrated the moves for Kotahi Tonu

The beautiful Tauhara Centre is in Taupo overlooking the lake and opposite to the mountain of the same name.



It is a centre where the dances have been led for many years with Catherine and Nasir, two of NZ's very active dance leaders running it. It has now been passed onto their son, who continues their great work along with the many WWOOFAs, who were keen to join into the music improvisations on the last evening.



Before and after the weekend we had a chance to enjoy the hot river, another added bonus of this location:



The weekend also involved sharing and discussion. One of the hot topics was that of power, that came out of the Maori Zikr, Ko te Kore, with its strong male part of Tihei Mauri Ora that has been a challenge to some of the men in the dances. This was something that resonated strongly with me as a male who for many years felt uncomfortable about taking my power, as I saw it being used in such destructive ways by bullies, warmongers and perpetrators of domestic violence. It was only when I worked with Joanna Macy in the mid 80s in her *Despair and Empowerment in the Nuclear Age* workshops that I

came to see the difference between 'power over' and 'power with'. This was further reinforced by training in conflict resolution with its *cooperative power* and then in the Quaker prison non-violence program AVP, which uses *transformative power*. However it is finally in the dances that I encountered **Peace is Power** as Murshid Sam's translation of *Allah Ho Akbar*. Sharing these views and hearing the views of others in the group further enriched the weekend for me.

Overall the experience left me feeling that the Dances of Universal Peace are making a very real contribution to peacemaking in what appears in mainstream media as quite a troubled world in these times. In gratitude to all the ancestors of the dances Hazrat Inayat Khan, Murshid Sam, Ruth St Denis and the dance leaders and mentors, like Shafia and Wendy, who have established the dances as an international network in some 32 countries as well as all the Murshids and Murshidas in the Sufi Ruhaniat International, who under the very capable leadership of Pir Shabda Kahn provide the Sufi foundation for the dances.

