

# YOUREX

## AUCKLAND Rainbow Parade Returns

Saturday 21 February  
7.30pm Ponsonby Road



# Un-BOX MORE.



**BOX**  
ALL-ELECTRIC

SPECIAL OFFER FROM

**\$29,990**  
+ORC<sup>1</sup>

**More space. More tech. More fun!**

The all-new Dongfeng BOX is an all-electric city car offering up to 317km of range (WLTP)<sup>2</sup>. With striking design, a surprisingly spacious interior, and smart technology, BOX is the modern lifestyle EV built for those who want to stand out.

Packed with intelligent features including auto-parking, L2 Driver Assistance, and a 360° camera, brought together through a crisp 12" HD touchscreen with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. Inside, enjoy a ventilated and heated driver's seat, smart storage solutions, and V2L power output – giving you power wherever life takes you.

6-year / 200,000km  
VEHICLE WARRANTY<sup>3</sup>

8-year / 200,000km  
BATTERY WARRANTY<sup>3</sup>



**Book a test drive today.**

Contact your local dealership or visit [www.dongfeng.co.nz](http://www.dongfeng.co.nz)

**DONGFENG**

1. Available on new Dongfeng BOX vehicles purchased from authorised Dongfeng dealers between 1 February 2026 and 30 April 2026, or while stocks last. Price includes GST and excludes on-road costs. Cables and paint are not included in the offer. Offer not available in conjunction with any other promotion or discount. Overseas model shown. Vehicle specifications and colours may vary. Dongfeng New Zealand reserves the right to change, extend, or withdraw the offer at any time without notice. Finance is available to approved applicants only, with standard lending criteria, fees, and conditions applying. 2. WLTP figures are calculated using the official NZ Government conversion calculator, based on the manufacturer's CLTC test data. 3. Whichever comes first. See [dongfeng.co.nz](http://dongfeng.co.nz) for full terms and conditions.

# WHAT'S INSIDE

FEBRUARY 2026

## 6 Auckland Rainbow Parade Returns Saturday 21 February

Top tips from parade pros to ensure you get the most from your day on Ponsonby Road before celebrating Pride and partying into the night.

## 10 STI Testing 101

Tend Pakūranga GP Dr Ji-Young Park takes us through what to expect and when to get tested.

## 12 Out & About

Family Bar, G.A.Y Auckland and Eagle Bar all feature in our scene photography highlights.

## 14 Woof! The Auckland Rainbow Dog Show

Woof returns on Sunday 8 March, and long-time doggie judge and Kiwi drag legend Buckwheat shares her favourite memories of the joyful family-friendly daytime event at Ponsonby's Western Park.

## 16 Auckland Arts Festival

Our top picks from 2026's packed festival, plus we talk to Creative Director Joel Baxendale and Theatre Designer Lucas Neal about festival highlight Werewolf.

## 18 The Court Theatre

Christchurch's The Court Theatre's Associate Artistic Director Tim Bain discusses March's Rainbow Theatre Festival, and actors Emma Katene and James Kupa peel back the layers of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

## 20 Christchurch's Beachside Revival

We check out New Brighton's community-driven resurgence.

## 30 Pride Giveaways

A bumper selection of giveaways – from theatre to music to makeup – to celebrate Aotearoa's proudest months.

## 32 Taane Mete

One of New Zealand's most celebrated professional dancers talks to Steven Oates about yoga, movement and coming home to yourself.

## 38 Getting Married in Vegas

Our guide to eloping in the city of sin, and experiencing Las Vegas' new golden era.



Fun in the sun at Las Vegas Pride.



[facebook.com/yourexisgay](https://facebook.com/yourexisgay)



[twitter.com/yourexisgay](https://twitter.com/yourexisgay)



[instagram.com/yourex\\_is\\_gay](https://instagram.com/yourex_is_gay)

# WHY RENOVATE WHEN YOU CAN BUILD NEW



Scan here to enquire about removing  
and rebuilding your home.

# REMOVE AND REBUILD

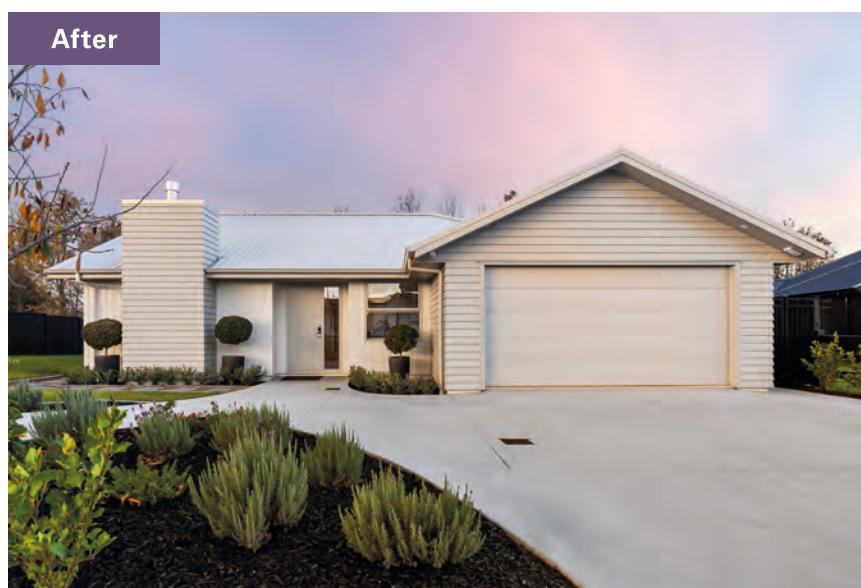
**With modern building standards, renovating may be far from cost-effective. Replacing your old place with a brand new G.J. Gardner home could easily be a smarter investment.**

Not only will you get the home you want, without compromise, but you'll also maximise the value of your location.

At G.J. Gardner, we can manage the whole project for you, including consents, permits and all the legal stuff. We'll plan the job so your old place is removed and the new one built in the shortest possible time, minimising any disruption to your lifestyle.

Happy customers and word of mouth have helped us become New Zealand's Most Trusted Home Builder, year after year.

**So before you make plans to renovate your old place, give us a call to see what you could build new.**



**G.J. Gardner. HOMES**

# A GUIDE TO THE AUCKLAND RAINBOW PARADE



Saturday 21 February – Ponsonby Road

## ARRIVE EARLY FOR...

**Steam Train**  
– making a very welcome return.



**AK Samba**  
– bringing rhythm and movement to Ponsonby Road.

**face painting**  
– because glitter improves everything.



**Drag shows**  
Ponsonby Road food Court  
6.00pm  
**Ponsonby Central**  
6.35pm

## WHAT TO EXPECT

### Electric. Joyful. Unapologetic.

If you've never been to the Auckland Rainbow Parade before, here's the moment that gets everyone every year: the first float turns the corner, the crowd roars, and suddenly you realise you're part of something much bigger than yourself.

This year, that feeling hits even harder. At a time when the world can feel fractured – even within our own communities – the parade arrives as a genuine moment of unity. It's not just the rainbow community showing up, but the wider community standing alongside us. Differences fall away. Everyone's welcome. More than a celebration, it's a reminder of the power of coming together.

**Pro tip:** Arrive from 5.30pm to catch the build-up. That's when the energy really starts to hum.



## FLYING SOLO?

START ON THE STEPS AT PONSONBY CENTRAL — GREAT ENERGY, EASY CONVERSATIONS. OR BOOK THE SMIRNOFF GRANDSTAND FOR AN INSTANT SENSE OF BELONGING.



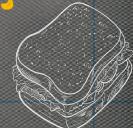
## Fuel Up

CHAPEL BAR & BISTRO, JACUZZI, TOBI, DAPHNE'S, BLUE BREEZE INN  
ESPECIALLY IF YOU LOVE OUTDOOR SEATING AND BEING RIGHT IN THE THICK OF IT.



## Underrated refuel stops

BODAGA (TRUST US ON THE SANDWICHES), THE TINTED ROSE, EST 1901, LIME BAR, NAMI RECORD BAR, CAFÉ 39, PONSONBY SOCIAL CLUB.



## WHERE TO WATCH THE PARADE



## WATCH OUT FOR...



When it finally rolls past after months of planning, the feeling is simple: pride. This parade exists because volunteers believe in how special it is — and because giving back to community matters.

## WHY IT MATTERS

**The Auckland Rainbow Parade** represents unity, inclusivity, and safety — a visible, joyful reminder that everyone deserves to feel seen and celebrated.

Showing up matters. Being there is a way of thanking those who paved the way, supporting people still finding their feet, and allies showing visible support for the community.

If people leave feeling a little lighter, a little more connected, then the world is a slightly happier place.

tips from a  
**PARADE PRO**

- Pick your side of the road early — barriers make crossing tricky once the parade is close.
- Charge your phone (or bring a power bank).
- Prepare for Auckland summer: sunscreen and a hat... or a rain jacket and umbrella. Probably both.
- Bring a handheld fan if it's hot.
- Travel light.
- Bring your loudest cheering voice.
- Feeling nervous? Talk to someone next to you. It's one of the friendliest events of the year. Look out for each other — that's the whole point.



## FROM THE EDITOR



PHOTO | MEO BAAKLI (@MEOBAAKLINI) AT THE TILL DEATH DO US PART CHAPEL, LAS VEGAS (@PALMS)

### Happy Pride!

Getting married at the end of last year was such a proud moment for my husband and me. Being able to do it in Las Vegas was the cherry on top of that sweet sundae. It is shocking to look back and think that just 15 years ago that wouldn't have been legal in New Zealand, and less than 10 years ago in Australia.

So it is important to celebrate, this Pride and the 40th anniversary year of Homosexual Law Reform, how far we have come. That sentiment of pride and celebration will be felt strongest on Ponsonby Road at the Auckland Rainbow Parade on Saturday 21 February, when we must remember those who came before us and paved the way for the rights we have today.

In 2026, *YOUR EX* celebrates its 35th year in publication (previously as *Man2Man* and *Express*) and we thank the people who worked tirelessly to help this publication be a platform to help our communities achieve those law changes.

# YOUR ex

UNAPOLOGETICALLY QUEER

#### PUBLISHER

TMO Publications LTD

#### EDITORIAL

Oliver Hall  
editor@gayexpress.co.nz  
021 206 2902

#### ADVERTISING

Matt Fistonich  
advertise@gayexpress.co.nz  
021 420 680

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Meo Baaklini  
Tux Hika  
Berlynn Holdmann  
Peter Jennings  
Alex Judd  
Gerry Keating  
Steven Oates  
Dr Ji-Young Park  
Jackie Powell  
Vannessa Rushton  
Ross Smith

#### PRINTER

Webstar

#### DESIGN

Spinc Media

[www.YourEx.co.nz](http://www.YourEx.co.nz)



COVER | THE RETURN OF THE AUCKLAND RAINBOW PARADE, DESIGNED BY JOEL AMORES

## YOUR EX's TALENTS



**CRAIG YOUNG (RIP)**  
had been a fixture within the LGBTQ+ community and other social movements for over 40 years until he passed late last year. We are proud to publish his final opinion piece this issue.



**JASMIN SHEIKH**  
splits her time between managing finances for a large real estate firm and indulging her passion for photography, specialising in events of all kinds.



**JOEL AMORES**  
designs *YOUR EX* pages. He is a founding member of Spinc Media, which has been producing graphics and artistic illustrations for magazines since 2011. When he's not working, you'll find him camping or off-roading.



**JESSIE LEWTHWAITE**  
works in rainbow inclusion and awareness and likes to joke that she is gay for pay. She splits her spare time between co-chairing the Rainbow NZ Charitable Trust, being an exec for Rainbow Auckland and playing video games.



**ANGUS McDougall**  
Angus is a New Zealand Fashion Week ambassador and *Fashion in the Field* judge, who channels his love for the fashion and beauty industries into crafting recommendations that celebrate inclusivity, individuality, and self-expression.



This publication has been printed by Webstar, a Toitū enviromark diamond certified company and a winner of a Green Ribbon Award "Minimising our Waste".

# DOVATO is designed differently

– a complete HIV regimen with two medicines in a single once daily tablet.<sup>1</sup>

**2** Unlike most HIV treatments that have 3 or 4 medicines, DOVATO has just 2 medicines in a single tablet.<sup>1-3</sup>

 DOVATO is as effective at helping you stay undetectable\* with fewer medicines in your body – today and tomorrow.<sup>1,3-6†</sup>

## THAT'S THE DOVATO DIFFERENCE



Ask your doctor and learn more about DOVATO today!

For more information scan the QR code or visit [www.dovato.co.nz](http://www.dovato.co.nz)

**DOVATO is a prescription only medicine – please consult with your doctor or pharmacist before taking DOVATO. Common side effects people may experience are headache, nausea, and diarrhoea.<sup>1</sup>**

\*Undetectable means reducing the HIV in your blood to very low levels (<200 copies/mL for >6 months) with ART, which helps prevent sexual transmission of HIV.<sup>2,5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Based on data from the GEMINI 1 & 2 studies (patients new to treatment) and TANGO study (patients replacing their current HIV treatment). DTG + 3TC was compared with a regimen containing either 3 or 4 medicines, measuring either the percentage of patients with a viral load of <50 copies per mL or the percentage of patients with a viral load of ≥50 copies per mL.<sup>4-5</sup>

**Abbreviations:** **HIV**, human immunodeficiency virus; **ART**, antiretroviral therapy; **DTG**, dolutegravir; **3TC**, lamivudine.

**References:** **1.** GlaxoSmithKline NZ, DOVATO Consumer Medicine Information, 2023. Available at: [www.medsafe.govt.nz/consumers/cmi/d/dovato.pdf](http://www.medsafe.govt.nz/consumers/cmi/d/dovato.pdf) (accessed Jan 2024). **2.** PHARMAC. Pharmaceutical Schedule, Antiretrovirals. February 2024; version 31:1-320. Available at: [www.schedule.pharmac.govt.nz/2024/02/01/Schedule.pdf](http://www.schedule.pharmac.govt.nz/2024/02/01/Schedule.pdf) (accessed Feb 2024). **3.** Department of Health and Human Services. Guidelines for the use of antiretroviral agents in adults and adolescents with HIV, March 2023 (accessed Nov 2023). **4.** Cahn P, et al. AIDS 2022;36(1):39-48. **5.** Osiyemi O, et al. Clin Infect Dis 2022;75(6):975-986. **6.** EACS (European AIDS Clinical Society) Guidelines, version 12.0 (updated October 2023).

**DOVATO** (dolutegravir and lamivudine) is a film coated tablet containing 50 mg of dolutegravir (as dolutegravir sodium) and 300 mg of lamivudine, which is used for the treatment of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV-1) infection in adults and adolescents (from 12 years of age weighing at least 40 kg) who have no known or suspected resistance to either antiretroviral component. **DOVATO is a Prescription Medicine. Dovato has risks and benefits and should be initiated by a doctor experienced in the management of HIV infection. Ask your doctor if DOVATO is right for you. Use strictly as directed.** If you have concerns or if you have side effects, see your doctor, pharmacist, or healthcare professional. Normal doctor's consultation fees apply. For more information, you can view the Dovato Consumer Medicine Information at [www.medsafe.govt.nz](http://www.medsafe.govt.nz). Dovato is a funded medicine. Special Authority criteria apply. Trademarks are owned by or licensed to the ViiV Healthcare group of companies. © 2024 ViiV Healthcare group of companies or its licensor. Marketed on behalf of ViiV Healthcare by GlaxoSmithKline NZ Limited, Auckland. **Adverse Events involving GlaxoSmithKline products should be reported to GSK Medical Information on 0800 808 500.** Date of Approval: **Apr 2024** | Date of Expiry: **Apr 2026** | TAPS-NP20685 | PM-NZ-DLL-ADVR-240001

**This advertisement is intended for NZ audiences only.**





# STI TESTING 101

*Tend Pakūranga GP Dr Ji-Young Park takes us through what to expect and when to get tested.*

**S**TI (sexually transmitted infection) screening can feel daunting to many people. Some of us, especially if we're LGBTQ+, might feel embarrassed or awkward talking about sex, but STI screening should be a routine part of healthcare for anyone who is sexually active. Sexual health providers should be able to help with no judgement, no matter your sexuality, gender identity, age, or sexual practices.

STIs are common and they may not show obvious symptoms, so it's important to get regular screening if you are at risk. It's not just about protecting ourselves, but it also helps to protect our communities.

## WHAT TO EXPECT:

When you go for an STI screen, your clinician will ask you some questions. You may be asked when you last had sex, whether this was a regular or casual contact, the gender of your partner(s), and the type of sex you had.

This is to determine your risk and the types of testing you might need. Depending on your risk factors and anatomy, the clinician will arrange testing for you. If you require swabs such as anal, vaginal, or throat swabs, you can usually collect these yourself with instructions on how.

In some cases, you may need an examination (e.g. if you have pain), and the clinician might take a swab then. You might also need to do urine and blood tests. HIV also has newer tests,

like saliva or finger-prick self-tests that you can access through Burnett Foundation Aotearoa.

## YOU SHOULD GET TESTED IF YOU:

- Have any signs or symptoms of an STI, e.g. unusual genital or anal discharge, burning when you pee, sores, or raised lymph nodes around the groin
- Have had sexual contact with someone with an STI
- Have recently changed sexual partners or have multiple sexual contacts
- Find out you are pregnant
- Have recently had any non-consensual sexual encounter
- Or any time you would like to be screened

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU GET TESTED?

It's important for all sexually active men who have sex with men to be screened at least once a year, as there's a higher risk of STIs. We recommend 3-monthly screenings for men who have sex with men and have risk factors, including having a new partner or multiple sexual contacts, participating in group sex, using PrEP, and/or using recreational drugs during sex.

For other populations, we recommend regular testing if you are sexually active, especially if you have multiple sexual partners. It's best to

talk to your sexual health provider about how often you need to be tested, as this advice will be individualised.

## WHEN TO GET TESTED AFTER A SPECIFIC EVENT

If you have been in contact with someone who has an STI, it's important to get tested as soon as possible — don't wait!

If you are worried about any other specific sexual event and you don't have any STI symptoms, we have different recommendations for when to get tested:

- *Chlamydia and gonorrhoea:* test 2 weeks after the last unprotected sexual intercourse
- *Syphilis:* test 3–6 weeks after the event. Some tests may require up to 12 weeks for accurate results
- *HIV:* test after 4 weeks and repeat in 3 months

Overall, STI screening should be a safe, confidential, and respectful process. It's a routine health appointment like any other, so please don't be afraid to reach out to your GP or other local sexual health clinics.

You can book discreet STI screening with Tend directly through the Tend app if you live in Auckland, Bay of Plenty, or Canterbury. Taking care of your sexual health is part of taking care of yourself — and we're here to make it easy.

**Download the Tend app today or visit [tend.nz](https://tend.nz)**

**If you have a health query you want answered, email it to [ask@gayexpress.co.nz](mailto:ask@gayexpress.co.nz)**



# Let's talk about sex

Discreet healthcare  
in-clinic or online,  
where every body  
is welcome.



Scan the  
QR code  
to find out  
more



**tend**

[tend.nz](https://tend.nz)  
@tendnz

PLAY AT FULL VOLUME 2026  
OCTOBER 29 TO NOV 1  
WWW.RAINBOWGAMES.CO.NZ

REGISTRATIONS OPEN 15 FEBRUARY

FOLLOW RAINBOW GAMES FOR UPDATES

**rainbow games'26**  
TĀMAKI MAKĀURAU AUCKLAND

OUT & ABOUT

# A NEW ERA OF LOVE AT FAMILY & G.A.Y

The new owners of *Family & G.A.Y* are embracing their role as guardians of a cherished queer sanctuary. With heartfelt commitment, they took to social media to promise to protect and uplift the community these spaces serve—ensuring they remain places of safety, joy, and chosen family, all year round.



Family & G.A.Y  
K Road, Auckland.  
PHOTOS | JASMIN SHEIKH



Buy Your Pic Here.

RICHARD O'BRIEN'S

# ROCKY HORROR SHOW

THE LEGENDARY  
ROCK & ROLL MUSICAL

DON'T  
**DREAM**  
IT,



BE IT.

**AUCKLAND | CHRISTCHURCH  
WELLINGTON**

**FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2026**

**BOOK TODAY AT TICKETMASTER & TICKETEK**

# WOOF! WHERE QUEER JOY GOES WALKIES IN AUCKLAND

*On Sunday 8 March, Woof! The Auckland Rainbow Dog Show returns to Ponsonby's Western Park, celebrating queer community and canine charm. Long-time Woof judge and drag legend **Buckwheat** tells YOUR EX why she keeps returning to this community-first event.*

**W**or many in Tāmaki Makaurau's rainbow community, *Woof! The Auckland Rainbow Dog Show* isn't just a Pride event — it's a joyful rite of passage. Held each year under the trees of Ponsonby's Western Park, *Woof!* is where queerness, community and canine chaos meet, usually with glitter involved. Few people understand its evolution better than Buckwheat, one of Aotearoa's most beloved drag legends and a long-time supporter and doggie judge for *Woof!*'s best in show competitions.

"When *Woof* first started, it was intimate and scrappy," Buckwheat reflects. "Now it's bigger, brighter, and far more diverse." What's grown alongside the scale and production values is the sense of belonging. *Woof!* has become an 'all-types-of-family' event, welcoming queer folk, allies, kids, elders, dogs, and those who are just Pride-curious. Importantly, it's done this without losing the grassroots warmth that made it special in the first place.

That sense of continuity is something Buckwheat treasures. "It's great seeing owners and pets return year on year," she says. "You notice how they've evolved, how committed people are to the event. That's a testament to *Woof!* itself." Like any good community gathering, *Woof!* holds memories — some more chaotic than others. Asked about a moment that still lives rent-free in their head, Buckwheat laughs. "I once brought my neighbour's dog, Ike. Word of advice: if you're



bringing a dog, make sure the dog knows you. I very much overestimated our relationship! So, leave it to the professionals or the actual owners."

At its heart, *Woof!* endures because it's accessible and unapologetically joyful. "People turn up! The numbers speak for themselves," Buckwheat says. "It welcomes everyone and reminds us that celebration and visibility can be playful and healing." In a Pride landscape that can sometimes feel overwhelming or commercial, *Woof!* offers a non-threatening, tail-wagging entry point. It's a place where being visible feels light, fun, and safe.

That community-led ethos is exactly why events like *Woof!* still matter, even as rainbow representation grows more mainstream. "Community-led events build real relationships, trust and belonging — things institutions can't always create," Buckwheat explains. For younger or still-finding-themselves members of the community, seeing queer joy embodied matters deeply. "It gives people the chance to see others living and enjoying their authentic lives. That visibility can be life-changing."

If *Woof!* were a drag persona? Buckwheat doesn't hesitate. "She'd be glitter-splashed, a little feral, with a big bark and an even bigger laugh. Unpredictable, warm, impossibly charming, and called, *Glitterpaws Glamazon!*"

That sense of playful spectacle is something Buckwheat knows intimately. With a drag career spanning four decades, their proudest moments range from performing at the 2005 Venice Dance Biennale to — as she puts it — realising she was officially "ancient" when the Auckland War Memorial Museum dedicated an exhibition to her. What's kept drag meaningful all this time is the same thing that keeps *Woof!* alive: people. "New voices, new politics, new audiences. Drag reinvents itself, and you have to listen and make space for others."

For younger wannabe performers, Buckwheat's advice is simple and generous: be kind, honour your roots, build community before fame, and never underestimate the power of your attitude. "No one likes working with a diva," she adds with a wink.

**Woof! The Auckland Rainbow Dog Show** returns to Ponsonby's Western Park at 1pm on Sunday 8 March. Bring your dog on a lead, your chosen family, and a heart full of joy and mischief.

# WOOF

## PawsUp

TEXT WOOF TO 3181  
TO MAKE A \$3 DONATION  
DONATION T&CS AT  
WWW.SPCA.NZ/TEXTS

PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY NUTRIENCE

8th SUNDAY  
*March*  
WITH A RAIN DATE OF  
SUNDAY MARCH 15th

1PM

## Where:

WESTERN PARK PONSONBY,  
BERESFORD ST ENTRANCE  
HOSTED BY MC STEVEN OATES  
& CELEBRITY GUEST JUDGES

WIN:  
PRIZES  
FOR BEST DRESSED,  
TALENT & MORE



DONATE NOW



<https://shorturl.at/ZcWA8>

\$5 ENTRY FEE PER EVENT  
ALL PROCEEDS GOING TO  
THE SPCA. DONATE BEFORE  
THE DAY AND GO IN THE  
DRAW TO WIN A PRIZE.

Nutrience  
**SUBZERO** RULE FOUNDATION  
[rulefoundation.nz](http://rulefoundation.nz)

**YOUNiQ**  
UNAPOLOGETICALLY QUEER

# WHAT NOT TO MISS AT AUCKLAND ARTS FESTIVAL 2026



PHOTO | ALLISON MICHAEL ORENSTEIN

*Te Ahurei Toi o Tāmaki Auckland Arts Festival* is set to light up the city from 5–22 March, turning Tāmaki Makaurau into a vibrant hub of creativity, storytelling, and artistic connection. With 18 jam-packed days of world-class performances and cultural moments, this year's Festival promises something for every kind of art lover. Here are nine standout shows set to become this year's festival favourites.

## MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS

**Sau Fiafia! Boogie Down! With Island Vibes**  
Thursday 05 March • 5.30pm • Aotea Square

Kick off the Festival with a free, high-energy Pacific funk party featuring the Island Vibes collective — a nine-piece band that bridges Pacific musical traditions with modern funk and afrobeat rhythms, blending heritage influences and big-band energy. Perfect for all ages, this open-air launch sets a vibrant tone for the Festival with soulful hooks and feel-good grooves that invite everyone to move, mingle and soak up Tāmaki Makaurau's creative energy.

## Julia Bullock with Auckland Philharmonia

Saturday 7 March • 7.00pm • Great Hall, Auckland Town Hall

Grammy-winning American soprano Julia Bullock presents an exclusive Aotearoa concert with the Auckland Philharmonia. One of our time's most adventurous vocal artists — Bullock's known for mixing classical repertoire with jazz and soul influences, to create music that bridges emotional intimacy with symphonic depth.

## 27 Club

18–20 March • Spiegeltent, Aotea Square

Part rock concert, part storytelling tribute, 27 Club celebrates the enduring legacy of artists lost at age 27, including Hendrix, Joplin, Winehouse and Cobain, performed by some of Australia's fiercest musical talent. With an epic setlist from grunge to classic rock anthems, 27 Club has been a certified hit across 14 Australian cities and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

## He Manu Tīrōri

Saturday 21 March • 5.30pm • Spiegeltent, Aotea Square

He Manu Tīrōri showcases a new generation of waiata in te reo Māori — emerging directly from the Waiata / Anthems project, a groundbreaking initiative that debuted at No. 1 on the official NZ charts in 2019 by re-recording well-known songs in Māori to make the language more accessible through familiar music. Expect artists like Muroki, MOHI and Jordyn with a Why to blend contemporary sounds with moving cultural resonance.

## Big Horns

Saturday 21 March • 7.30pm • Great Hall, Auckland Town Hall

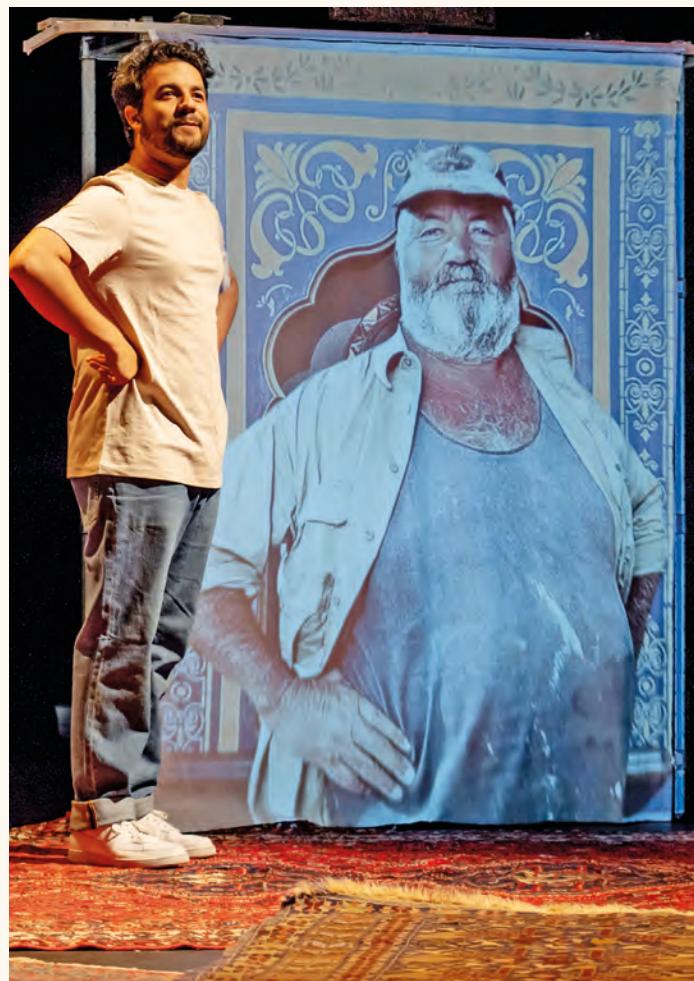
Close out your Festival with a funk-fuelled celebration as Big Horns bring their brass-rich,

# TE AHUREI TOI O TĀMAKI AUCKLAND ARTS FESTIVAL

PHOTO | ROSS SMITH



Royal New Zealand Ballet's Macbeth.



A Place in the Sultan's Kitchen.



Sau Fiafia Boogie Down Island Vibes Singers.

genre-crossing set. This homegrown brass-funk collective isn't just a band — they're known for reinventing dancefloor favourites from Prince to Earth, Wind & Fire with zero backing tracks,

meaning every groove and horn blast is played live on stage.

## CIRCUS & DANCE DELIGHTS

*Royal New Zealand Ballet's Macbeth*  
4–7 March • Kiri Te Kanawa Theatre, Aotea Centre

The Royal New Zealand Ballet is one of the world's older ballet companies (formed in 1953 and granted its 'Royal' title by Queen Elizabeth II in 1984). Macbeth is a brand-new co-production with West Australian Ballet that pushes Shakespeare into 2026's media-saturated world. Alice Topp's soaring choreography and a thunderous score bring a genre-defying twist to the classic political tragedy and its timeless themes of ambition and greed.

*Duck Pond*  
12–15 March • Kiri Te Kanawa Theatre, Aotea Centre

Circa is one of the world's most celebrated contemporary circus companies, known not just for physical spectacle but for theatrical innovation — and Duck Pond is a cheeky reimagining of Swan Lake that played to sold-out audiences internationally before landing in Tāmaki Makaurau for the first time. A must-watch for contemporary circus fans who enjoy a balance of humour with breathtaking skill.

## THOUGHT-PROVOKING THEATRE

*A Place in the Sultan's Kitchen*  
12–15 March • Rangatira, Q Theatre

Equal parts theatre and culinary experience, this unique show by Joshua Hinton invites audiences into his family's food stories as he recreates his grandmother's chicken curry live (he literally cooks on stage). Combining music, memory and the sensory delight of smell and taste, it's an intimate, cross-cultural celebration of identity, belonging and flavour — a truly multi-sensory Festival experience.

*The Visitors*  
19–22 March • Rangatira, Q Theatre

Written by Muruwari playwright Jane Harrison, The Visitors reimagines a pivotal moment in Australian history — the arrival of the First Fleet — from the viewpoint of Indigenous elders, reframing the narrative with wit and humanity rather than a colonial perspective. This theatrical exploration of hospitality, change and choice is a powerful reminder of history's complexity.

All of these shows and more, will be performed as part of Te Ahurei Toi o Tāmaki Auckland Arts Festival. For more information and to book tickets, visit [aaf.co.nz](http://aaf.co.nz).

# ESCAPING THE DOOM: WHY WE ALL NEED UPLIFTING QUEER THEATRE RIGHT NOW

*The Court Theatre's Associate Artistic Director Tim Bain shares how their Rainbow Theatre Festival is evolving to meet the moment.*

For Associate Artistic Director Tim Bain, The Court Theatre's current energy can be summed up in a single word: momentum.

"We're doing well," he says, almost casually. "People are coming to 9 to 5 in their thousands — it's been a huge, huge hit."

Since moving into its long-awaited central city home, The Court Theatre has enjoyed what Bain calls a "honeymoon period": audiences eager to check out the new building, see what's possible, and reconnect with live theatre. But he's under no illusion that the novelty alone will sustain them.

"You get that first year where people are like, 'Oh, we want to go check it out and see it all.' But soon, we're no longer the new building in town. (Christchurch's new stadium opens in April.) Then the hard work starts."

That philosophy — that theatre has to earn its audience — sits at the heart of The Court Theatre's Rainbow Theatre Festival, now in its third year. And if the first two iterations proved anything, it's that Bain has no interest in repeating himself.

## A FESTIVAL THAT RESPONDS TO THE WORLD

"It's never the same twice," Bain says. "I learned very quickly after the first one: to mix this up every single year. Seeing what's going on in the world and tailor the experience for that."

Last year's festival leaned heavily into drag, a deliberate response to increasing attacks on drag

performers internationally. This year, the tone has shifted again — shaped by a global climate that Bain says has started to feel exhausting, even from Aotearoa.

"A lot of our news comes from America," he explains. "With what's going on there around LGBTQ+ rights, it just seemed like no one was having a good time. I felt that starting to creep in here — through politics, through how we're living, how we're seeing the world."

The result is a Rainbow Theatre Festival that is consciously lighter on its feet. "This year, everything had to be positive and uplifting and kind and joyous," Bain says. "Nothing could sit in the dark."

That meant stepping away from heavier community projects like last year's *The Laramie Project*. "There's enough doom and gloom," he says simply. "This needs to be uplifting and fun — an escape for people to come to."

## QUEER STORIES — TOLD WITH ALLIES

Another key evolution has been a renewed focus on allies. Bain is clear that the festival's core queer audiences show up year after year — but he's equally interested in who isn't coming yet.

The answer lies in programming that feels welcoming rather than intimidating: more mainstream entry points, more familiar faces, and more consideration for audiences often overlooked — teenagers and older theatregoers alike.

One of the clearest examples is *Divas of Theatre*,



an event designed to gently invite people in through familiarity. "It started as a question," Bain says. "What is queer literature? But also: who are some people older or straight audiences already know?"

Featuring respected performers like Linda Milligan and Justine Smith — both long-time allies — the event pairs recognisable names with explicitly queer material. "They were trailblazers," Bain says of Milligan and her peers. "They showed allyship when it might have been scary to do so."

## THE COURT THEATRE X YOUR EX

The format is intentionally low-pressure: 60 minutes of scenes and monologues, scripts in hand, drawn from a wide canon that includes *The Vagina Monologues*, Oscar Wilde, and contemporary works. "It's designed for theatre nerds and buffs," Bain says. "And for hearing work out loud that we don't often get to hear."

### CHAOS, CAMP & COMMUNITY

Of course, Rainbow Theatre Festival isn't all gentle introductions. Bain lights up when talking about the events that push The Court Theatre into less expected territory.

"I'm excited to have drag kings for the first time," he says, pointing to Hugo Grrrl's

*Hugo's Rainbow Show* and their appearance in the *The Gigantic Gay Late Night Game Show*.

The latter is exactly what it sounds like —

and more. Set on the mainstage, it's designed for what Bain cheerfully calls "absolute carnage".

"We're breaking the audience up into doms, subs, and switches," he says. "They fight for points. There's a pie-eating competition — but it's off people's laps."

Will it get complaints? Almost certainly. "But I don't mind that," Bain shrugs. "It's designed to be fun — a place to escape for an hour and let yourself go. It's naughty. But why can't The Court Theatre be naughty?"

### A FESTIVAL OF ONE-NIGHT-ONLY SHOWS

If there's one phrase Bain repeats like a warning, it's this: these are one-offs.

That's especially true of the festival's centrepiece, *Everybody's Talking About Jamie*. The

contemporary British musical — hugely successful, adapted into a film, and never before staged in the Southern Hemisphere — will be presented in a one-night-only concert performance.

"It blows my mind we got it," Bain admits. "I asked — and like last year — it just came through."

Even more remarkably, the production features teenagers playing teenagers. "A 16-year-old is playing Jamie," Bain says. "That's a huge ask."

With limited rehearsal hours and no second chances, the urgency is real. "If people are reading this and they're even slightly interested — book," Bain says. "This is your only chance. Theatre only exists in the moment between the people sitting in the seats and what's happening on stage."

### LOOKING AHEAD: RISK, SCALE AND AMBITION

Beyond Rainbow Theatre Festival, Bain is clearly energised by the challenges ahead in The Court Theatre's wider programme.

*Feeling Afraid As If Something Terrible Is Going To Happen* pushes the boundaries of solo performance. *Let the Right One In* promises to be the most technically demanding production the theatre has ever staged — complete with water, blood, and brutal theatrical spectacle.

"There's a swimming pool," Bain says plainly. "There's a truck-ton of blood. People are hung up by their feet."

Then there's *Teenage Dick*, a bold reimagining of *Richard III* set in an American high school, which requires disabled performers to be cast in specific roles. "That's a turning point for us," Bain says. "We finally have a space that makes that possible."

It's ambitious. It's risky. And it's exactly where Bain believes theatre needs to be.



5 - 8 Mar 2026



Divas of Theatre  
7:30pm, Thursday 5 March

Queered Scriptless  
10pm, Friday 6 March

Hugo's Rainbow Show  
1pm, Saturday 7 March

Everybody's Talking About Jamie  
6pm, Saturday 7 March

Scared Scriptless featuring Two Fat 'Fine  
7:30pm, Saturday 7 March

The Gigantic Gay Late Night Game Show  
9:30pm, Saturday 7 March

Joel Creasey Live  
6:30pm, Sunday 8 March



Book now!  
[courttheatre.org.nz](http://courttheatre.org.nz)



CORE FUNDER

creative NZ  
ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND · TOI AOTEAROA

THE  
**COURT**  
THEATRE





# CHRISTCHURCH'S BEACHSIDE REVIVAL

Aerial view of New Brighton pier.

**Oliver Hall** checks out New Brighton's community-driven resurgence.

Just 15 minutes from Christchurch's central city lies New Brighton, a suburban stretch of sand and sea, known for its artistic vibe, breezy surf culture and surprisingly affordable real estate. Since moving to Christchurch, I've been telling anyone who'll listen that this quirky seaside pocket is the sort of place where you can find a gorgeous three-bedroom house on a quarter-acre just 200 metres from the ocean for under \$800,000 — something that's almost unheard of in major New Zealand centres. Locals point to the reason for this being past zoning and trading restrictions that saw shops closed on weekends in the 1990s, and slowed growth for decades. But today, there's a palpable buzz in the air as new businesses, spaces and events take shape, drawing both locals and visitors back to the shore.

## SOAK IT ALL IN

At the heart of the suburb's charm is its beach. Stretching for miles in either direction, the sand draws swimmers, longboarders, kite surfers and walkers alike. Step out onto one of Australasia's longest ocean piers and you'll understand why people return again and again.

Just off the sand, He Puna Taimoana Hot Pools ([hepunataimoana.co.nz](http://hepunataimoana.co.nz)) is a highlight of any visit. These seaside saltwater pools are a stunning complement to the beach experience, designed for ultimate relaxation. There are five open-air pools at varying temperatures, a cold plunge for the brave, and a sauna and steam



He Puna Taimoana hot pools.

room — all positioned to take in sweeping views of the Pacific. Entry is via timed sessions that run every two hours, capped at 80 people. When we visited, there were only 20 people in there — giving everyone plenty of space to spread out and soak in peace. The atmosphere is blissfully laid-back, with light background music and a gentle ocean breeze reinforcing the feeling that time here moves just a little slower.

After a soak, we wander into the on-site café, Saturdays ([saturdayscafe.co.nz](http://saturdayscafe.co.nz)), which is an absolute standout. The vibe is relaxed and stylish, with a sleek open kitchen, polished concrete floors and tasteful coastal touches. Their menu is small but refined: we opt for the house-made vegan red smoothies, bursting with flavour and freshness, and toasted salmon bagels. Everything is made on-site with care and quality that's obvious in every bite. Whether you're soaking wet or dressed for brunch, the space welcomes everyone — with a beachside, dog-friendly outdoor area and elegant indoor seating that looks straight out over the steaming pools.

## VILLAGE VIBE

You'll find the heart of the suburb around New

Brighton Mall and the newly developed Village Green ([greaternewbrighton](http://greaternewbrighton)). Here, colourful beach huts now host pop-ups, start-ups and small art exhibitions. On Sunday afternoons, the covered stage comes alive with local talent — and the energy is truly infectious. Sunday's open mic afternoons attract serious talent like singer Esther Romana, who performed a breathtaking cover of Massive Attack's "Teardrop."

Nothing rounds off a day in the sun better than a local brew at Southpaw Brewing Company & Taproom ([southpawbeer.com](http://southpawbeer.com)). This independent craft brewery pours beers brewed on-site. We loved their bitty Uncle Charlie's APA and alcoholic ginger beer, while the gays on the table next to us were audibly raving about their IPA tasting flight. There's plenty of outdoor seating, dogs are welcome, and you can see and hear all of the excitement at the Village Green.

## MORE THAN JUST A DAY TRIP

Whether you're chasing a restorative weekend getaway, looking to plant roots by the sea, or find a beachside rental investment — New Brighton can no longer be ignored.



GAMERSPHERE

## YOUR GO-TO DESTINATION FOR GAMES, GEAR AND GEEKY GOODNESS.

Gamersphere NZ is your one-stop shop for **Board games, Party Games, RPGs, Card Games, Puzzles, Miniatures and Hobby Supplies.**



From family fun to serious strategy, we've got everything you need to level up game night – delivered straight to your door across Aotearoa.



**GAMERSPHERE.NZ**



# URGE

@CHRISTCHURCH

# PRIDE

9PM - MARCH 14TH

@**XCHC**

CHRISTCHURCH

TICKETS ON SALE

[iTICKET.CO.NZ](https://iticket.co.nz)

# URGE

## EVENTS PRESENTS

# URGE

# BLACK

9PM - APRIL 11TH

@VALHALLA

## WELLINGTON

TICKETS ON SALE

[iTICKET.CO.NZ](https://iticket.co.nz)

Burnett  
Foundation  
Aotearoa

— YOURex —

— NAKED  
KIWI

# PERFORMING IDENTITY: THE QUEERNESS OF BEING EARNEST

*This month The Court Theatre are bringing Oscar Wilde's classic comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest* back to the stage. Actors Emma Katene and James Kupa talk to Oliver Hall about peeling back Wilde's layers of innuendo, queer-coded themes, and sharp gender commentary that was so ahead of its time.*

**O**scar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* has long been framed as a drawing-room comedy: light, frothy, impeccably mannered. But beneath the cucumber sandwiches and clipped Victorian wit is a play obsessed with performance.

"My biggest connection is probably to the way people have to present themselves in everyday life," Emma Katene (who plays Gwendolen) tells us. "And how that changes depending on who you're with. It changes in your relationships, it changes in your friendships, it changes how you present yourself publicly to people you feel responsible for."

For Katene, that constant recalibration feels quietly queer. "Queer people go through that a lot, not only when we're exploring our identity, but even after we've settled into ourselves."

James Kupa, who plays the gleefully duplicitous Algernon, locates that queerness directly in Wilde's writing.

"When you delve into the script — the amount of layered nuance and innuendo packed in there is like a delicious lasagne," he laughs. "There are so many things that are funny and so coded that, unless you really dig into it, you could easily miss."

## BUNBURYING, THEN AND NOW

*The Importance of Being Earnest* follows a group of aristocratic, high-society characters whose lives

unravel thanks to a shared commitment to lying. Algernon and his friend Jack invent alternate identities — a practice Algernon christens "bunburying" — to escape social obligations and indulge their desires elsewhere.

But things become complicated when romance enters the fray. "It's misunderstanding creating really good drama," Katene explains.

The Court Theatre's production keeps the play firmly in its original period setting — corsets and all — but for Katene, that aesthetic acts as a Trojan horse.

"It's a cool hook to bring up interesting conversations," she says. "There's so much on display around masculinity and femininity and different gender energies. If you hide it in a little pocket of 'period', it can be a bit more digestible."

That includes the rapid intimacy between women, the effeminacy of the male characters, and the way touch operates onstage — details that land differently for contemporary audiences than they might have a century ago.

## PLAYING THE LIE

Algernon is, by design, a difficult character to love. He's glib, self-indulgent, casually misogynistic — and lying to almost everyone.

"He cares only for what feels best in the moment and what's most fun," Kupa says. "He puts on a façade of being a respectable member of high society, but he doesn't actually like that world very much."

Yet Algernon can't tip into villainy without collapsing the play. "Cecily has to fall in love with him genuinely," Kupa says. "And he genuinely falls in love with Cecily. So it's a tightrope."

That balancing act happens line by line. "He pumps out some of the most misogynist, gross lines," Kupa admits. "So how do we approach this with the audience and the other characters still wanting to be around him? It's delicate surgery."

Katene's Gwendolen, meanwhile, resists compromise altogether — a quality that makes her one of Wilde's most arresting creations.

"I've approached her as someone who is new to feminism," Katene says. "Like anything, the first time you're exploring something, you go in really hard, but the pendulum has to swing."

Rather than reading Gwendolen's certainty as rigidity, Katene frames it as defiance.

"Gwendolen knows what she wants, and her way of being against society is to be staunch in that."

That confidence, however, isn't uncomplicated. "Even though she's staunch, she still cares a lot about what other people have to say," Katene



Emma Katene.

## THEATRE



James Kupa.

adds. "That's an interesting self-worth to explore."

### WILDE'S WOMEN

Katene is particularly drawn to how Wilde writes women — and how often they're underestimated.

"Compared to other male authors writing female characters, his women are quite well fleshed out," she says. "That feels connected to the fact that he maybe lived a double life. He understands the nuance of people a bit more than other authors I've read."

She wonders who Wilde was really observing. "Artists are a reflection of their times. He must have been associating with a diverse range of people — even if they were largely upper class. It makes me wonder what perspectives he was absorbing."

### WHAT LINGERS AFTER THE LAUGHTER

Both actors want audiences to enjoy *Earnest* for what it is: one of theatre's great comedies.

"I hope they have trouble breathing," Kupa grins. "Not for any medical reason — but because they've laughed their guts out and can't get out of their seats."

Katene hopes something quieter follows the laughter.

"I'd really like them to come out having a think about who they are inside versus who they say they are outside," she says. "Every single person needs to think about that. And if they haven't been inspired to think about it, this is a great opportunity."

In a play built on lies, that question may be Wilde's most enduring truth.

**The Importance of Being Earnest** plays at The Court Theatre from 21 February to 21 March. For more information and to book tickets, visit [courttheatre.org.nz](http://courttheatre.org.nz)

21 Feb - 21 Mar 2026

# The Importance of Being Earnest



**Book now!**  
[courttheatre.org.nz](http://courttheatre.org.nz)

CORE FUNDER

**creative**nz  
ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND · TAI AOTEAROA

**THE**  
**COURT**  
THEATRE

# QUEER SURVIVAL IN A NUCLEAR FUTURE

*Before his death late last year, Craig Young penned his final opinion piece for YOUR EX, reflecting on Cold War anxieties and *Fallout*'s predictions for LGBTQ+ communities following a nuclear event—a reflection that seems more pertinent than ever in 2026.*

**D**efending LGBTQ+ and abortion rights wasn't the only cause that defined my activism in the 1980s—I also found time to be part of the peace movement.

Interestingly, despite both the anti-nuclear and homosexual law reform campaigns occurring simultaneously, there was surprisingly little crossover between the two. While some lesbians participated in feminist anti-nuclear activism, many gay men involved in the HIV/AIDS crisis in the US were angered by the Reagan administration's prioritisation of the arms race over urgently needed healthcare infrastructure.

Eventually, President Reagan experienced a shift in perspective, initiating strategic arms limitation talks with Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev. Around this time, the Soviet Union withdrew from its disastrous occupation of Afghanistan. What followed astonished the

world. By 1989, the USSR relinquished its grip on Eastern Europe, allowing democratic governments to replace former communist regimes. The Berlin Wall fell, Germany reunified peacefully, and by 1991, the Soviet Union itself collapsed following a failed coup, giving rise to the Russian Republic.

The end of the Cold War ushered in profound transformations: apartheid collapsed in South Africa in 1994; the IRA declared a ceasefire in Northern Ireland; and Cold War-era social conservatism receded, paving the way for LGBTQ+ rights to advance across much of the Western world. However, progress was uneven. Countries like Russia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia saw the rise of authoritarian, religious governments that opposed inclusive values.

Although the nuclear arms race was reversed, the US, China, and Russia continue to maintain significant nuclear arsenals. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, China's ambitions over Taiwan, and US President Donald Trump's expansive authoritarian desires all underscore the continued threat. Thankfully, New Zealand's nuclear-free stance, enacted over 40 years ago, remains firm—keeping our ports closed to nuclear-powered or -armed vessels.

Sadly, the peace and LGBTQ+ movements have largely continued in isolation from each other. On the positive side, medical advances like protease inhibitors have subdued the HIV/AIDS crisis, and military discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals has been largely eradicated across the Western world, including Aotearoa (since 1993). Yet, it raises a troubling question: are we ready for a future where an

LGBTQ+ individual might be the one to launch a nuclear strike?

While climate change now dominates existential anxieties, the threat of nuclear war hasn't vanished. The BBC's 1984 docudrama *Threads* still offers a grim vision of what nuclear conflict could mean—especially for the Northern Hemisphere.

Today, pop culture examines these issues through speculative fiction. The *Fallout* video game franchise imagines a post-nuclear world rooted in an alternate reality where 1950s design and technology persist, even as feminism, ethnic diversity, and LGBTQ+ rights have progressed. In its narrative, a uranium shortage in 2080 triggers nuclear war between the US and China.

Importantly, *Fallout* includes queer and trans characters among its survivors. LGBTQ+ representation is embedded in its world, from same-sex couples to trans and non-binary individuals, including romanceable characters and player options. The inclusive New California Republic contrasts sharply with the brutal, homophobic 'Caesar's Legion'—though even that faction isn't free from closet cases.

The franchise, while fictional, poses a fascinating question: how might LGBTQ+ lives persist and evolve after catastrophe? As engaging as it is confronting, *Fallout* offers a bleak yet inclusive vision of queer survival in a radiated world.

Nuclear war must never be allowed to happen—but if it did, queer people would still be here, surviving, loving, and fighting for their place in the world.



Experts in:

**FAMILY FORMATION**  
**SURROGACY**  
**DONOR AGREEMENTS**  
**PARTNERSHIP VISAS**  
**IMMIGRATION**  
**HIV HEALTH WAIVERS**  
**TRANS RIGHTS**  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
**WORK VISAS**  
**APPEALS**  
**CHARACTER ISSUES**

and more.

[www.dslaw.nz](http://www.dslaw.nz)



*Rainbow owned and operated*

**AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS**

**40 YEARS**

**N** **A** **Z**

**DRAG BRUNCH WITH THE TĪWHAS**

Sat 7 Mar  
Circa Theatre,  
Wellington

**BOOK NOW** [FESTIVAL.NZ](http://FESTIVAL.NZ)

**PRIDE & PLAY**  
BOARD GAMING... IN STYLE

**23rd Feb 2026**  
**5pm - 10pm**

**LEVEL 38 TAKEOVER**  
**BAR ALBERT**

**BOOK HERE**

# WEREWOLF: WHY IMMERSIVE THEATRE RESONATES IN A POST- LOCKDOWN WORLD

*Creative Director Joel Baxendale and Theatre Designer Lucas Neal discuss making art on a budget, how sound and lighting can make the absurd feel possible, and why a new wave of theatre audiences are seeking interactive experiences.*

**T**here's something deliciously revealing about *Werewolf* — the latest immersive work from Binge Culture Collective — being described as a show for people whose Halloween is their Christmas. Playful, slightly unhinged, and tapping into a shared appetite for risk and collective experience, it lands at a time when audiences increasingly want more than passive spectatorship.

Set to appear in both the Auckland Arts Festival and Aotearoa Festival of the Arts, *Werewolf* co-creator Joel Baxendale says festival backing brings visibility, and credibility, that independent companies can rarely achieve alone.

“It’s a huge step up in profile,” he says. “It gives you legitimacy. It can springboard people into international presentations. People take you more seriously once you’ve been in those festivals.”

It’s also a first. “This is the first time we’ve been in either of those major arts festivals — and we’ve been going for 15 years,” Baxendale adds. “It’s a milestone in itself, and hopefully we can continue to tour it further afield.”

## PRESSURE CREATES DIAMONDS

*Werewolf* arrives at a complex moment for live performance. While audiences are showing renewed hunger for in-person experiences, the conditions for creating work remain precarious.

“The work coming out right now is so exciting — especially the local stuff,” Baxendale says. “The industry’s just in a very tough spot. That’s not unique to the arts, but the arts have always been underfunded, and we’re really feeling that now.”

That pressure, he suggests, has pushed artists to reflect more deeply on why they do what they do.

“Not that we need tough conditions to make good art,” he says, “but it does influence people. It makes you question your motivations. If you’re



Joel Baxendale.



Lucas Neal.

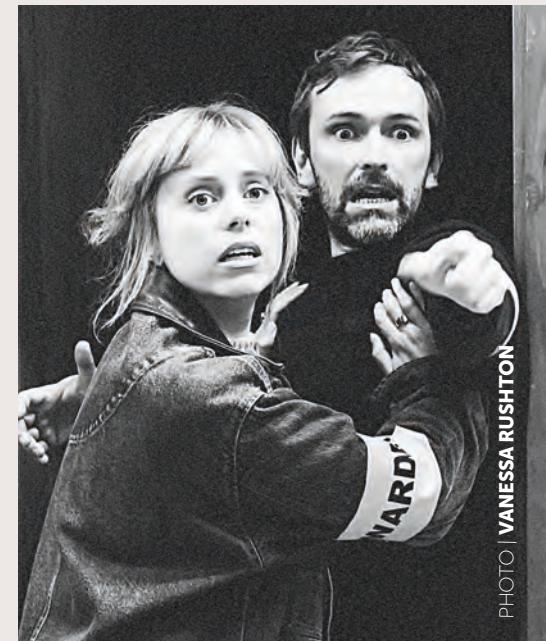


PHOTO | VANESSA RUSHTON

are already established can just about manage, but there’s no space for anyone else. That’s the tragedy.”

Even for seasoned artists, survival is far from guaranteed. “We’d be considered pretty solidly mid-career at this point, and are just scraping by,” he says. “So what does that mean for emerging artists?”

## THEATRE FOR RISK-TAKERS

“One of the things we’ve deliberately tried to do with this work,” Baxendale says, “is to contrast something very naturalistic, like an emergency civil defence scenario, with something completely absurd — like werewolves.”

The format invites audiences into the world without requiring them to perform. Participation is structured, optional, and intentionally low-pressure.

“Instead of giving people a broad prompt — which can be intimidating — we let them have their little moment,” Baxendale explains. “That often opens them up to being more playful, depending on who they are.”

Crucially, the show accommodates different levels of comfort. “People who like contributing — it gives them permission to do that. And those who prefer to observe — they can do that too. There’s a lot of scope for people who enjoy playing games. It’s a show that welcomes that energy.”

While improvisation features, it’s never chaotic. “The story runs on its own tracks. But we do a kind of democratic performance — we won’t shut the audience down. We’ll take their offers and run with them,” Baxendale says.

## WHY QUEER AUDIENCES WILL RECOGNISE THEMSELVES IN IT

For set and lighting designer Lucas Neal, whose creative lens shapes the work, *Werewolf*’s

resonance with queer audiences is rooted in a broader cultural lineage.

"There's a pretty well-documented connection between queer audiences and horror," Neal says. "It's always been a genre where queer people could see themselves."

In *Werewolf*, horror isn't just about fear — it becomes a framework for transformation, secrecy, and social negotiation. These are long-standing themes in queer storytelling and community life.

The show's audience, Baxendale adds, tends to sit slightly outside the mainstream. "It's a bit of a cult thing," he says. "There's a crowd that really digs this show. They're a little younger, maybe a bit more alternative — and they make great audiences!"

As Neal puts it, *Werewolf* has also landed at just the right cultural moment. "This kind of show is very zeitgeist," he says, pointing to the popularity of social games and reality formats like *The Traitors*. "These kinds of games have been around forever, but in the past few years people have started to really embrace them and explore what other kinds of art can grow from them."

#### DESIGN AS STORYTELLING

While *Werewolf* thrives on structure and interaction, Neal's broader practice reveals how deeply he values design as a narrative tool — especially when it resists spectacle for its own sake.

Asked about recent influences, Neal points to *Over and Out*, a Wellington show at BATS Theatre.

"It was very simple," he says, "written and performed by an actor called Jackson Burling. It was a verbatim piece — he interviewed a truck driver and performed that interview on stage."

What struck Neal was how subtle design choices transformed the space. "The way they heightened it — brought you into that world of being in a truck — using lighting and projection was incredible," he says, crediting lighting designer Jacob Banks,

projection and set designer Rebekah de Roo, and sound designer Oli Devlin.

"It was transformative with very few elements — flickers of light suggesting passing streetlights, low rumbles of the truck. They created an amazing illusion with minimal set — basically a chair and a few props."

For Neal, the power came from restraint, not excess. "You had to believe in the world to understand the character," he says. "Making the audience feel like they were in that truck was key."

The takeaway? Immersion doesn't require high-tech bells and whistles. "It was a great example of how you don't need flashy tech to make something powerful and beautiful. Every element was intentional — and essential to the storytelling."

#### CHOOSING EXPERIENCE OVER OBSERVATION

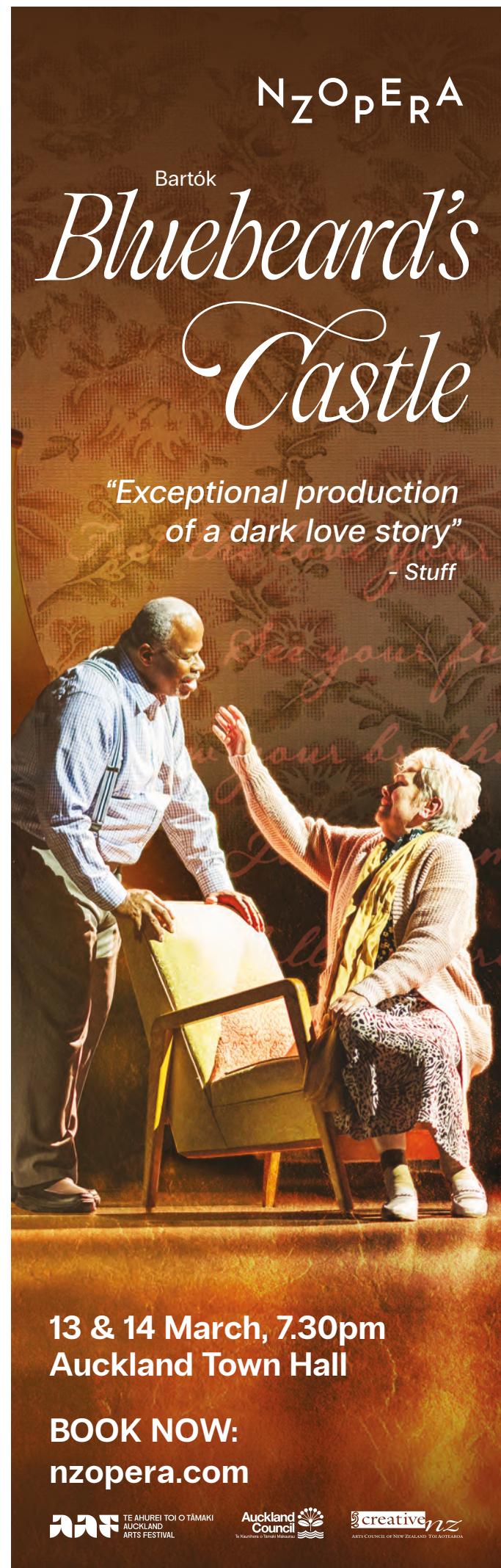
If *Werewolf* speaks to a broader shift, it's one that favours shared experience over passive consumption. Neal notes that audiences are increasingly drawn to work that feels social — something you attend with friends, talk about afterwards, and remember as an event, not just a product.

"These shows offer people a chance to *have* an experience. People are probably a bit starved of social connection — and immersive work answers that."

That hunger, paired with Binge Culture Collective's long-standing dedication to immersive theatre, makes *Werewolf* feel less like a novelty and more like a culmination — a show shaped by years of experimentation, landing at just the right time.

Whether you're drawn in by the horror lineage, the collective decision-making, or simply because Halloween really is your Christmas, *Werewolf* extends an invitation: not to watch from the sidelines, but to step inside.

**Werewolf will be performed as part of Te Ahurei Toi o Tāmaki Auckland Arts Festival, from Thursday 5 to Sunday 8 March. For more information and to book tickets, visit [aaf.co.nz](http://aaf.co.nz).**



**NZOPERA**

Bartók

# Bluebeard's Castle

*"Exceptional production of a dark love story"*  
- Stuff

**13 & 14 March, 7.30pm**  
**Auckland Town Hall**

**BOOK NOW:**  
**[nzopera.com](http://nzopera.com)**

**AAT** TE AHUREI TOI O TĀMAKI AUCKLAND ARTS FESTIVAL

**Auckland Council** Te Mana Rauhī o Tāmaki Makaurau

**creative nz** ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND TOI AOTEAROA

# POOL PARTY

All items available at [e-modusvivendi.com](http://e-modusvivendi.com)



PHOTOGRAPHY | JOAN CRISOL [@joan\\_crisol](https://www.instagram.com/joan_crisol)

MODELS | MIGUEL ANGEL [@miguelfit26](https://www.instagram.com/miguelfit26)

JULIEN PAJE [@julien\\_paje](https://www.instagram.com/julien_paje)

JAVIER SERNA MONTANA [@javi.serna](https://www.instagram.com/javi.serna)

CREATIVE DIRECTOR | BILLY HAZEL [@billyhazel](https://www.instagram.com/billyhazel)

The Viennese Swimwear Line features an enchanting, almost three-dimensional floral pattern with skilfully curated vector blossoms and leaves, delicately printed onto sustainable swimsuit fabrics.



## GIVEAWAYS

### Win a Double Pass to *Ten Thousand Hours*

Don't miss *Ten Thousand Hours*, a moving performance exploring legacy, time, and creativity by circus company Gravity & Other Myths. Part of Te Ahurei Toi o Tāmaki Auckland Arts Festival, performed from 19 to 22 March. Giveaway for the 20 March performance.



### Win a Double Pass to *The Importance of Being Earnest*



Wilde's wit meets timeless satire at Christchurch's The Court Theatre. Win a double pass to the date of your choice. A deliciously clever comedy of mistaken identities and sparkling dialogue. Check out our interview on page 22.

### Win a Double Pass to *The Court Theatre's Rainbow Theatre Festival*

Celebrate queer stories and bold performance as part of Christchurch Pride from 5–8 March. Win a double pass to an event of your choice during this vibrant weekend of theatre, connection, and pride. Check out our interview on page 18.



### Win a Double Pass to *Peach PRC's NZ Shows*

Pop princess Peach PRC is bringing her Wandering Spirit Tour to Aotearoa, thanks to our friends at Frontier Touring! Win a double pass to her Auckland or Wellington show and experience the glittery, heartfelt chaos live. Don't miss this rising star.



### Win a Double Pass to *A View From the Bridge*

SILO Theatre brings Arthur Miller's iconic tale of passion and betrayal to life, from 9 April to 3 May. Win a double pass to the Thursday 9 April performance of this classic drama with searing relevance, directed by Anapela Polata'iavao.



### Win a **MAC Cosmetics** *Pride* Prize Pack



Glow up for Pride with a glam MAC lineup worth celebrating! One winner scores Skinfinish Sunstruck Matte Bronzer, MACSTACK Mascara, Strobe Beam Liquid Blush, Lipglass Air, and Sleek Satin Stain lipstick. Bold expression, feel-good beauty, and radiant vibes guaranteed. \*Shades may vary from image.



Scan the QR Code to be into win!

## DIRECTORY

### Dr Ravi Sandhu

GENERAL PRACTITIONER



### Dr Dave McKenzie

GENERAL PRACTITIONER

CityMed is a modern primary healthcare facility, which offers you a full range of integrated medical services in the heart of Auckland City.

### GENERAL CITY DOCTORS

Ground Floor, Quay West Building, 8 Albert St, Auckland

Ph 09 377 5525 for an appointment

[www.citymed.co.nz](http://www.citymed.co.nz)

### m<sup>c</sup>veaghfleming

### TONY WALKER

LAWYER

DDI 3066-731

[twalker@mckeaghfleming.co.nz](mailto:twalker@mckeaghfleming.co.nz)

### GEORGE IRELAND

LAWYER

DDI 3066-736

[gireland@mckeaghfleming.co.nz](mailto:gireland@mckeaghfleming.co.nz)

### MAREE ADAMS

LAWYER

DDI 09 306 6720

[madams@mckeaghfleming.co.nz](mailto:madams@mckeaghfleming.co.nz)

### McVeagh Fleming Auckland Office

377-9966 | [www.mckeaghfleming.co.nz](http://www.mckeaghfleming.co.nz)





**THE PLACE TO BE THIS SUMMER!**

- Secluded grounds
- Outdoor pool
- 12 cubicles
- Dry & wet saunas
- Two spa pools
- Plenty of showers
- Three movie areas
- Free carparking

**Entry \$20 non-members**  
Even less for members  
**Open 12 noon everyday**  
(including public holidays)



**AUCKLAND'S BUSIEST BATHHOUSE**  
**MONDAY & TUESDAY BUDDY DAYS**

76 WINGATE ST, AVONDALE • [WWW.WINGATECLUB.CO.NZ](http://WWW.WINGATECLUB.CO.NZ)  
PH 09 828 0910



**AUTUMNFARM.COM**  
CAMPING | CABINS | LODGE ROOMS | DORM  
LUSH GROUNDS | POOL | ADULTS ONLY | CLOTHING OPTIONAL



**PROMOTE IN OUR NEW ONLINE DIRECTORY FROM JUST \$69 PER MONTH\***

\*ON A 12-MONTH ANNUAL LISTING PACKAGE

**Adult Shop + Cruise Club**

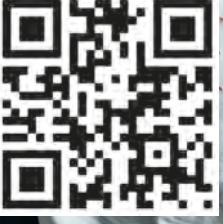
Adult Toys  
Lubricants  
Jocks, Clothing  
Douche Products  
BDSM Gear

Porn Room, Glory holes  
Private rooms, Slings  
Special Events

12 Canada Street  
(down drive)  
Newton, Auckland  
09 3022250

Shop Online 24/7

**BASEMENTNZ.COM**



**YOU ARE NOT ALONE..**

Supporting & empowering People Living with HIV, challenging stigma and changing attitudes

**FREE RAPID HIV TESTING**  
*No appointment needed, just drop-in*

**0800-HIV-LINE | BODYPOSITIVE.ORG.NZ**

**FEBRUARY EVENTS**

**LATE SHIFT**  
since 1989

**PRIDE CELEBRATION**

**BEAR Cruise Night**  
Saturday 7 February from 7pm

**Pre BGO Cruise Night**  
Saturday 14 February from 7pm

**Parade Cruise Night**  
Saturday 21 February from 7pm

**KiwiFist**  
Saturday 28 February from 7pm

**Bring a friend - 2 for 1 entry to ALL Event Nights**

Sub-level 1, 25 Dundonald St, Eden Terrace, Auckland  
**(09) 373 2657**

**lateshift.co.nz**

# FINDING YOUR BREATH

*Taane Mete, one of New Zealand's most celebrated and influential professional dancers, talks to Steven Oates about yoga, movement and coming home to yourself.*

PHOTOS | ALEX JUDD

**F**or many of us, yoga sits in the mental “maybe one day” pile — something we admire from afar but never quite roll our mats out for. Too bendy. Too spiritual. Too intense. Too many Lycra-clad bodies doing impossible things on Instagram. But according to Taane Mete, one of Aotearoa’s most respected dance practitioners, that intimidation factor is largely a myth — and one worth dismantling.

“Yoga doesn’t need to be practised every day, and it certainly doesn’t need to be hard,” Taane tells Steven. “That idea alone stops so many people before they even begin.”

Instead, he reframes yoga as something far more accessible: a practical tool for releasing stagnant energy and reconnecting with the body we already have. For anyone spending long hours at a desk, lifting heavy tools, or simply feeling stuck in their body, yoga offers a way back in.

The entry point, Taane explains, isn’t movement at all. It’s breath.



“The easiest way to access your personal essence is through slow nasal breathing,” he says. Sitting in a chair, lying on your back or side, he suggests simply inhaling through the

**“Yoga isn’t about performing postures like the most experienced person in the room. It’s about understanding that this is a journey — learning to listen to your body and respect its limits.”**

nose and exhaling through the nose five times, repeating the cycle three times. “You’ll notice how slowing down the breath calms the central nervous system.”

It’s a deceptively simple practice, but one that lays the foundation for everything that follows. Once comfort is established, movement can be introduced.

For beginners, Taane’s advice is refreshingly uncompetitive. “Start with no expectations,” he says. “Yoga isn’t about performing postures like the most experienced person in the room. It’s about understanding that this is a journey — learning to listen to your body and respect its limits.”

That mindset shift is especially important in a culture obsessed with transformation. Asked whether yoga can help achieve the elusive “summer body”, Taane is measured. Yoga can absolutely support positive change and help people feel better in their bodies, he says, but it’s only part of a bigger picture that includes

diet, sleep and consistency. “A summer body takes effort, but it helps when the routine is simple. Let yoga support you — just don’t let it rule you.”

When it comes to practical starting points, Taane keeps things grounded. One of his favourite beginner-friendly poses involves lying on your back, drawing both knees into the chest, then letting them drop gently to one side in a spinal twist, held for five breaths.

More than anything, he encourages people to make yoga enjoyable. “Make it fun — and make it social if you can,” he says. Going to a class with a friend or chatting to the person next to you can dissolve a lot of anxiety.

“The more present you are with your body and practice, the more transformative yoga becomes,” Taane says. “Not just physically, but in how you experience life.”

This philosophy is deeply informed by Taane’s own history. Known for his decades-long contribution to contemporary dance in Aotearoa — including work with Black Grace, Footnote Dance Company, Douglas Wright Dance Company and Atamira — his body has been both his instrument and his livelihood. After years of performance, yoga entered his life.

Fifteen years ago, he attended his first Bikram Hot Yoga class in Auckland. “It was pure survival just getting through the 90 minutes,” he laughs. The experience was intense and confusing — but the next morning, something shifted. “I woke up feeling alive, like floodgates had opened.”

Subtle changes followed. His mood improved. His body felt freer. His thoughts became less chaotic. “Then — bam — I was hooked,”



he says. Yoga brought him closer to what he describes as his ‘true essence.’

Despite this, Taane is clear that yoga hasn’t replaced dance. “Dance will always be part of my creative DNA,” he says. Instead, the two practices support one another. Yoga and teaching ground him in health and wellbeing; dance remains his creative expression. Breath, he notes, is the common language — the starting point for movement, healing and balance.

Today, Taane sees yoga as both medicine and diagnostic tool — a way to check in physically, mentally and emotionally. “We all age,” he says, “but for me yoga gives reassurance that I can stay active without feeling limited by life.”

Perhaps most powerfully, yoga requires nothing external. “I don’t need a machine, a prop or even a teacher,” Taane says. “Everything I need to access myself is already there.”

Yoga, after all, means “to unite” — and for Taane Mete, it’s about reconnecting body, breath and self, one slow inhale at a time.

**Taane Mete teaches and facilitates as a Retreat Leader at the multi-award-winning Aro Ha Wellness Retreat in Glenorchy.**



# WHAT STRAIGHT MEN GET WRONG ABOUT LESBIANS

**Jessie Lewthwaite** breaks down common myths about lesbian relationships, domestic violence stats, 'lesbian porn', and the reality of queer women's happiness.

Not long ago, I found myself in a part of town I didn't even know existed — in a bar where I'm fairly certain I wasn't welcome — doing my best to support a friend and his band. Before the show kicked off, a couple of local men confidently approached us, clearly under the impression they were taking us under their wing. At first, I was grateful.

Then we started talking about queerness.

With all the swagger of a straight, cis, white man who dropped out of high school, one of them announced that lesbian relationships are bad, actually — because, didn't you know, lesbians have the highest rates of domestic violence of any pairing?

Suddenly, I was questioning not only how much I liked the friend I'd come to support, but also whether I even liked music that much.

But my friend didn't flinch. She looked the guy in the eye and said, calmly:



"Do you actually want to talk about this and learn more? I need to know that before I make an effort to correct you."

The man had a wee tantrum, called my friend a bitch, and slunk away. His mate apologising profusely.

So no, that man wasn't open to learning. But maybe you are — and maybe you've got people in your life who are, too.

So let me go full Professor Jessie on you, and walk through a few of the myths you've likely heard confidently shouted by underachieving men in bars.

Let's start with the one that inspired this column: the myth about high rates of domestic violence in lesbian relationships.

Yes, one study did show that around 60% of queer women have experienced violence in relationships. But the study was inclusive — it surveyed bisexual women, late-in-life lesbians, and trans queer women.

And if you've guessed where this is going, you get a gold star: the violence was almost always perpetrated by a male partner.

Next up — and I think we all deserve a cheeky celebration — Pornhub has once again crowned "Lesbian" the most searched category in Australia and New Zealand. Go us! Isn't it heart-warming to have so much content about us... so readily available... and

so many allies consuming it?

Okay, yeah. Obviously, a huge percentage of lesbian porn isn't made by or for us.

While women — including straight women — do make up some of the viewers, the vast majority are straight men. This fuels the over-sexualisation of lesbians, and feeds into the idea that men can ask to watch or join in — and that we won't see that as a red flag large enough to end the conversation forever.

Also, watching lesbian, gay, or trans porn has no correlation whatsoever to supporting our rights. Just in case that needed saying.

Another favourite myth? That lesbians are desperately miserable and unfulfilled in our relationships.

This, of course — say it with me — is born of the patriarchy. The idea that women can be happy without a man? Unthinkable.

In reality, research shows lesbians are nearly twice as happy in our relationships as straight women. We also have a lot more orgasms. Not a coincidence!

So next time a random man hits you with one of these "facts," go ahead and hit him back with the real ones.

Tell him the facts don't care about his feelings — then tell him to smile more.

OUT & ABOUT

# EAGLE BAR KEEPS THE GOOD TIMES FLOWING ON K RD

Famed for its welcoming atmosphere, chilled drinks, and relaxed charm, Eagle bar is a magnet for both locals and out-of-towners looking to enjoy a vibrant night out.



**Eagle Bar**  
259 Karangahape Road, Auckland.  
PHOTOS | JASMIN SHEIKH



Visit us at 259 Karangahape Road, Auckland Central  
Open 7 days 4pm till late!

# Get Ready for Pride with Angus McDougall



@angusmcdougallnz

It's February and that can only mean one thing: it's Pride Month in Tāmaki Makaurau, and for me, it is a time to celebrate visibility, self-expression, and the confidence that comes from showing up exactly as you are. It is also a month of long days, big moments, and full calendars, which means beauty needs to feel supportive rather than stressful. This edit brings together the products I genuinely use to prepare, express myself, and move through Pride feeling polished, comfortable, and proud.

Before any Pride event, hair prep is non-negotiable for me. I always start with the *Bouf Flouf Factor Growth Leave-In Mask*. It deeply conditions, smooths frizz, and boosts shine without weighing my hair down, which is essential when I know I will be out all day. My go-to tip is applying it to damp hair and blow-drying for volume instead of using mousse. It gives me hair that looks healthy, glossy, and sets the perfect base for heat styling.

\$34.95, available at [farmers.co.nz](http://farmers.co.nz)



Once my makeup is done, I lock everything in with *MAC Fix+ Original*. I use this every Pride season because it hydrates, sets makeup, and gives my skin a natural radiant finish without feeling heavy. It keeps my makeup looking fresh and comfortable all day, even through heat, movement, and long celebrations.

\$61, available at [mecca.com](http://mecca.com)

Once my hair is prepped, I use the *ghd chronos professional HD motion-responsive styler* whenever time is tight. It gives me smooth style that actually holds. Whether I am going sleek or adding movement, my hair stays shiny and polished all day without feeling overworked.

\$500, available at [ghdhair.com](http://ghdhair.com)

With all the parties, heat, and heavier makeup that come with Pride, breakouts are part of this life.

#### *The Breakout Hack Rebound Serum*

*Rebound Serum* is what I use to keep my skin calm before the crowds. It is lightweight, fast-absorbing, and helps keep redness and stressed skin in check before long days and late nights.

\$49.99, available at [chemistwarehouse.co.nz](http://chemistwarehouse.co.nz)

For colour and creativity, I have been using *Kylee De Thier's She's Everything palette*.

I love that it genuinely gives me everything I need for a full face in one place – from bronzers and blushes through to contours, highlights, and eyeshadows, all designed to work together. Beyond how practical it is, I am genuinely proud to be using a product created by a young queer femme from Aotearoa.

\$79.99, available at [xobeautyshop.com](http://xobeautyshop.com)



For the sunny Pride days, *Boost Lab Goody Goody Sundrops* are always part of my routine. I use this featherlight SPF serum daily because it sinks in fast, hydrates my skin, and leaves a healthy glow without greasiness. It sits beautifully under makeup and helps protect my skin well past peak celebration hours.

\$44.95, available at [farmers.co.nz](http://farmers.co.nz)



After the glitter, glam, and late nights, I always prioritise taking everything off properly.

#### *Clinique Take The Day Off Cleansing Balm*

*Cleansing Balm* is what I use to melt away even the boldest Pride makeup. Glitter, waterproof mascara, and long-wear pigments dissolve easily, leaving my skin calm, comfortable, and restored.

\$88, available at [farmers.co.nz](http://farmers.co.nz) and [clinique.co.nz](http://clinique.co.nz)





**\$1,299,000**

## MANGAWHAI HEADS

23 WINTLE STREET

2 1 3



Superb Views - Location - Lock Up and Leave

This fully refurbished two double bedroom beach house is a great place to relax, rest and recharge in this beautiful natural environment. It is low maintenance, with no lawns, and nestled in established native bush on 1214m<sup>2</sup>. Wake to breathtaking views – and watch the full moon rise over the water.

Mangawhai is a well known escape with white sandy beaches, safe harbour, boasting markets, walks, fabulous cafes, wineries and a championship golf course. Enjoy an enviable lifestyle where there is much to love and explore.

### VIEWING

Contact me to request a viewing



**Paula Renner**  
027 498 4657  
p.renner@barfoot.co.nz

[barfoot.co.nz/910772](http://barfoot.co.nz/910772)



**KEV AESTHETICS NZ (KANZ)**



## COSMETIC INJECTOR

REFINED. RADIANT. UNMISTAKABLY YOU!

### KANZ TREATMENTS:

ANTIWRINKLE	DERMAL FILLERS
LIP FILLER	SKIN BOOSTERS

READY TO BECOME Refined.

RADIANT. UNMISTAKABLY YOU!

**AUCKLAND & NORTHLAND LOCNS**

**BOOK NOW!**



**KEVAESTHETICS.CO.NZ**



# LAS VEGAS IS IN ITS GOLDEN AGE

*From cutting-edge entertainment to world-class dining and unforgettable nights out, Las Vegas proves it still delivers the ultimate sensory escape whether it's your first visit or your fifth.*

Las Vegas has a reputation for excess, but with international tourism currently a little softer (thanks to the worst president the country has ever seen), the city feels calmer without losing any of the spectacle it's famous for. Hotels are better value, moving around the Strip is easier, and there's space to actually enjoy what's in front of you.



### VEGAS ON A BUDGET

Vegas doesn't require constant spending to be entertaining. Some of the city's best moments are completely free, and often just as memorable as the ticketed ones.

We loved the simple pleasure of picking up a beer from CVS and walking the Strip at night. It felt rebellious, and a great way to get your bearings. The Strip itself becomes the entertainment, and carrying alcohol purchased elsewhere doesn't stop you from entering any of the hotels or casinos. As the Southern couple next to us proclaim in thick Tennessee drawl, "there are no rules here!"

The Bellagio remains one of the best examples of how much the city offers without charging a cent. The Conservatory displays are meticulously produced and change seasonally, while outside, the fountains are one of the Strip's must-see features. Every 15 minutes the jets launch 460 feet in displays timed with music (both Classical and Pop) and crash back down, with an immensely satisfying crunch.

Free evenings like these, and visiting the wild Fremont Street Experience, which uses the world's largest video screen (nearly a mile long) as its neon ceiling, make it easier to justify splurging on standout shows and dining on other nights.

### FLAMINGO LAS VEGAS: THE CAMP CLASSIC THAT'S CENTRAL TO EVERYTHING

Where you stay in Vegas matters, and for us Flamingo Las Vegas ([caesars.com/flamingo-las-vegas](http://caesars.com/flamingo-las-vegas) | [@flamingo.vegas](https://@flamingo.vegas)) proved to be an

excellent base. Its central Strip location means it's easy to duck back to your room to reset before heading out again.

What stood out most, though, was how calming it felt once you stepped away from the casino floor. The gardens and water features provide genuine relief from the heat and noise, especially in summer.

With its 80th anniversary this year, Flamingo also sits comfortably within contemporary queer culture as the home of RuPaul's Drag Race Live! Elegant art deco renovations are refreshing the property without stripping away its personality, and new restaurants and bars from Gordon Ramsay and Lisa Vanderpump ensure you don't need to leave the lobby to have a memorable night out!

### YOU'RE GUARANTEED DIVAS, DARLING

Since Celine Dion's record-breaking residency in the early 2000s, Las Vegas learned they needed Divas to complement their line-up of crooners and bring the gays. Britney would follow in Celine's footsteps, and while both have since bid the Strip 'adieu', Vegas now always keeps queens in rotated residency.

During our four-night December stay, we are lucky enough to check out Mariah Carey and Leona Lewis. Jennifer Lopez is currently warming the stage, and Kelly Clarkson, Cyndi Lauper and Gwen Stefani all have dates announced over NZ's autumn and winter.

CONTINUED...

**Paint with pride this summer!**

**free!**

**Get your favourite Resene colour FREE!**



Visit your local Resene ColorShop for quality paints, colours and helpful advice to bring out the best in your project. **PLUS** bring in this page and get a **FREE** Resene testpot 60-80 mL in the Resene colour of your choice.\*

\* Available at Resene owned ColorShops only until 31 March 2026. Limit one coupon/free 60-80 mL testpot per household.

**Resene**  
the paint the professionals use

[resene.com](http://resene.com)

## TRAVEL

### ... CONTINUED

Seeing Mariah Carey perform at Dolby Live ([mgmresorts.com](http://mgmresorts.com) | [@dolbylive](https://@dolbylive)) highlights just how well-designed Vegas music venues are. The theatre manages scale without sacrificing intimacy, with excellent sound and strong sightlines. While the larger T-Mobile Arena up the road offers high-end fast food brands like Shake Shack and Pizza Forte as its F&B vendors, notching up the quality of your concert experience with every bite.

We see Leona Lewis at Voltaire ([venetianlasvegas.com](http://venetianlasvegas.com) | [@voltaireshow](https://@voltaireshow)), a small, plush, luxurious venue that famously opened in 2023 with a residency from Kylie Minogue. It's hard to imagine that you could see an artist of Kylie's stature in a venue with a maximum capacity of 1,000 people. Every seat has a fantastic view and table service, and even though we're not particularly close to the stage, Lewis brushes past our seats numerous times during the show. This makes Voltaire feel very special. If an artist you love is playing there, it's worth planning a trip around it.

### THE SPHERE: A NEW KIND OF SPECTACLE

The Sphere ([thespherevegas.com](http://thespherevegas.com) | [@spherevegas](https://@spherevegas)) has quickly become one of Vegas' most successful recent additions – it regularly has audiences applauding, even when there is no one on stage.

We experience *The Wizard of Oz*, with the 1939 classic movie remastered for the 160,000-square-foot, 16K resolution LED screen. The Sphere is a reminder of how breathtaking new technology can be, as industrial fans send leaves, scents and sprays spinning around, turning Dorothy's tornado into a multi-sensory experience that makes you feel like your glasses are about to fly off. The scale is immense.

With its own production arm 'Sphere Studios' now established, the Sphere will adapt more films specifically for its screen, alongside hosting concerts from legacy artists like the Backstreet Boys. If shows are sold out when you visit, this landmark still offers stunning displays on its exterior for free. One night we spend an hour just watching it from the Flamingo's car park – it's that impressive!

### EATING AT THE BEST RESTAURANTS

The number of world-class restaurants in Vegas is extraordinary, but securing reservations during peak hours can be challenging. The incredibly popular and ever-expanding Lip Smacking Foodie Tours ([lipsmackingfoodietours.com](http://lipsmackingfoodietours.com) | [@lipsmackingfoodietours](https://@lipsmackingfoodietours)) offer a practical solution.

These multi-award-winning tours (the *Vegas Review-Journal's* 'Best Tour' nine years in a row) move guests between several top restaurants in one evening, letting you enjoy a course at each. We did the Savours of the Strip tour, which takes us around some of Aria's top restaurants, but



Flamingo's Neon Glamour.



Voltaire.

other tours they offer take you off the beaten path to explore culinary delights in Vegas' Downtown, Chinatown and Arts District.

Our guide was extremely knowledgeable, passionate and knee-deep in Vegas's food scene – telling us about restaurants that hadn't opened yet that he was already booked in to try. The other foodies on the tour were fun, and the dishes we tried were sublime.

### OUR MOST ROMANTIC MOMENT

If there's one dinner that felt like true Vegas magic, it was High Steaks at the Rio ([highsteaks.vegas](http://highsteaks.vegas) | [@highsteakslv](https://@highsteakslv)), where we dined after our wedding – still in our tuxedos!

Perched on the 50th floor of the Masquerade Tower, the restaurant delivers one of the most dramatic vantage points in the city: wide-ranging views of the Strip and valley that stretch out like a glittering ribbon below you.

High Steaks is the creation of Vegas' most celebrated born-'n'-bred chef James Trees, who is credited with helping to transform Vegas' dining landscape. Menu highlights include the Wild Game Tartare, their signature Tomahawk, and the Mint Hot Chocolate Soufflé. Fine dining at its best!

### THE HEART OF THE GAY SCENE

For queer travellers, the Fruit Loop, just east of the Strip, is a compact cluster of LGBTQ+ bars and clubs. We arrived still in our tuxes — with



Inside The Sphere.



Lisa Vanderpump is on top at the Flamingo.

lots of the locals congratulating us and sharing their wedding stories.

We start at Gipsy ([gipsylasvegas.com](http://gipsylasvegas.com) | [@gipsylv](https://@gipsylv)), which proved to be the ideal entry point. Smaller and more intimate, it's a venue where drag performances and DJ sets coexist with actual conversation.

From there, we cross the road to Piranha ([piranhavegas.com](http://piranhavegas.com) | [@piranhavegas](https://@piranhavegas)), a multi-room club that leans heavily into EDM and Latin music. Operating for 20 years, Piranha has long been part of Vegas' queer nightlife mythology, with icons like Britney Spears visiting to let her hair down. We have our own celebrity sighting that night, spotting Mariah Carey's longtime make-up artist, Kristofer Buckle, catching up with friends on the large outdoor patio.

## TRAVEL



F1 Arcade.

If you want to extend your night further, the Fruit Loop makes it easy. Quadz Video Bar runs 24/7 and works well as both a starting point and an end. All the bars are minutes from each other, so no planning required.

### LOW ENERGY, BIG REWARD

The day after our wedding called for a different kind of Vegas — something celebratory but low effort, so it was ideal that the Flamingo's Pinky's by Vanderpump ([caesars.com](http://caesars.com) | [@pinkybyvanderpump](https://pinkybyvanderpump)) was the new place to have brunch on the Strip.

Unlike some Strip venues that lean dark and enclosed, Pinky's has floor-to-ceiling windows that bathe this opulent art deco-inspired space with natural light.

The cocktail menu was fun and naughty, featuring the 'Pump & Bump' caviar martini, and the stunning 'Less Espresso' espresso martini. On the food menu, must-tries include the indulgent lobster rolls and the baked Alaska, which arrives with just the right sense of theatre. The polished, playful experience we needed.

By this time, our legs are done with walking the Strip, so Vegas' long relationship with seated spectacle makes a lot of sense. *Cirque du Soleil* ([cirquedusoleil.com](http://cirquedusoleil.com) | [@cirquedusoleil](https://cirquedusoleil)) remains central to that tradition, having shaped the city's modern entertainment identity for more than 25 years. From *Mystère* — one of the earliest Cirque productions created specifically for Vegas, built around pure acrobatic spectacle — to newer formats like *Mad Apple*, which folds in cabaret and comedy for a

looser, variety-style experience.

Cirque has consistently evolved alongside the city, which has helped open doors for other producers like *Spiegelworld* ([spiegelworld.com](http://spiegelworld.com) | [@spiegelworld](https://spiegelworld)), whose award-winning shows *Absinthe* and *Atomic* push performance even closer to nightlife, capturing something Vegas does particularly well: treating entertainment as something you inhabit, not just observe.

The last stop on our Vegas itinerary is the F1 Arcade ([flarcade.com](http://flarcade.com) | [@flarcade](https://flarcade)). This space is a luxury gaming lounge meets nightclub, and it's beautifully finished. The DJ booth is one of the most stunning I have ever seen, and you don't need to be a Formula 1 obsessive to enjoy it. The simulators are intuitive, and the staff guide you through the experience. It's a smart option for anyone wanting a club-like experience without the energy for a wild night out.

### WHY VEGAS STILL WORKS

Las Vegas endures because it adapts. Right now, with the city operating at a slightly gentler pace, that flexibility alongside its cutting-edge, innovative entertainment options feels like its greatest asset. Whether it's your first visit or a return trip, Vegas still knows how to deliver golden moments that feel genuinely hard to replicate anywhere else. Despite Trump's tyranny, this city has created its best era ever.

**For more information on uniquely Vegas experiences, check out [www.visitlasvegas.com](http://www.visitlasvegas.com)**



**Trusted immigration support to the Rainbow community for more than 40 years.**

*Happy Pride!*



**People first, in a world that never stands still.**

📞 0800 800 636

📍 Auckland, Tauranga, Wellington, Queenstown

✉️ [nzimmigrationpartners.com](https://www.nzimmigrationpartners.com)

✉️ [nzimmigrationpartners.com](mailto:nzimmigrationpartners.com)



*With families on opposing sides of the world and no interest in spending stressful months organising (or paying for) a big wedding, we decided to elope to Vegas – and boy, we're glad we did!*

**B**eneath the neon, Las Vegas has quietly built one of the most efficient and stress-free wedding systems in the world. For us, that mattered more than anything.

Same-sex marriage has been legal in Nevada since 9 October 2014, and in the decade since, Las Vegas has become not just a symbolic place to marry, but a genuinely practical one.

The process is refreshingly straightforward. Couples can apply for their marriage licence online before arriving, then visit the Clark County Marriage License Bureau together with valid ID to collect the paperwork. The bureau is open 365 days a year, even on Christmas Day. "You would be hard-pressed to find another location on earth that makes getting married so easy," County Clerk Lynn Marie Goya tells us.

Once the licence is issued, the only remaining requirement is a ceremony conducted by a licensed officiant. From that point on, everything else is our choice.

#### Choosing a Chapel

We knew early on that we didn't want kitsch or parody. No Elvis. What drew us instead was the **Til Death Do Us Part Chapel** ([@palms](http://palms.com)), a striking black-and-white chapel located inside the Palms Casino Resort.

Designed by contemporary artist Joshua Vides,

the chapel is a fully immersive graphic art installation that feels hand-drawn and cinematic. Opened in 2019, it was conceived as a modern alternative to Vegas' traditional 'white chapels'. It can accommodate up to 25 guests, but we loved that it offered a specific 'Just The Two Of Us' package for couples eloping like us.

Despite being housed within a major resort, the chapel feels tucked away. There's no sense of being on display, which mattered in a moment that was emotional rather than performative.

#### A Ceremony That Felt Like Ours

Our ceremony was officiated by **Berlynn Holdmann of Hell Bent Hitchings** ([@hellbenthitchings](http://hellbenthitchings.com)), and from the outset, her approach set the tone: calm, warm and affirming.

A short pre-ceremony questionnaire allowed the service to be shaped around us without feeling scripted or sentimental. We changed our minds about writing vows, which was no issue for her, and on the day, she guided the ceremony gently while allowing emotion to surface naturally.

#### Suits You Sir

For suits, we turned to **Friar Tux** ([@friartux](http://friartux.com)), whose Las Vegas locations are well-versed in short timelines. The process was efficient and surprisingly flexible, with a wide range of modern styles available same-day. Our

Michael Kors tuxedos suited the chapel's stark black-and-white aesthetic perfectly, and they offered plenty of more colourful options for those looking for something more flamboyant.

#### Photography That Let the Moment Be the Moment

Our photographer, **Meo Baaklini** ([@meobaakliniphotography](http://meobaakliniphotography.com)), was so unobtrusive that it was genuinely easy to forget she was there. Looking back at the photos afterwards, what stood out most was how many warm, intimate moments she had captured that we didn't even realise were being documented at the time. It's the kind of photography that lets you relive the experience every time you look at them.

#### A 'Real' Wedding

One persistent myth is that Las Vegas weddings aren't "real". Goya is clear on that point: "Las Vegas weddings are legal ceremonies, and Las Vegas weddings are recognised in countries across the world (including New Zealand)."

And for those hoping to recreate a scene from *The Hangover*, "You cannot be drunk (or high on drugs) when you get married," she warns.

As we walk back through a casino heading off to dinner and a concert in tuxedos, it feels quite radical. Vegas didn't make a spectacle of our wedding. It simply made it stress-free – which is exactly what we were looking for.

**Visit [palms.com](http://palms.com) to book the Till Death Do Us Part chapel. For more information on eloping to Las Vegas, check out [visitlasvegas.com](http://visitlasvegas.com)**

# HECK YEAH, WE FLY THERE.

Explore iconic destinations across the USA  
with our United Airlines and Air NZ alliance



UNITED  
AIRLINES

AIR NEW ZEALAND



STAR ALLIANCE ☆

© 2025 United Airlines, Inc. All rights reserved.

# NEW ZEALAND'S BIGGEST GAY NIGHTCLUB

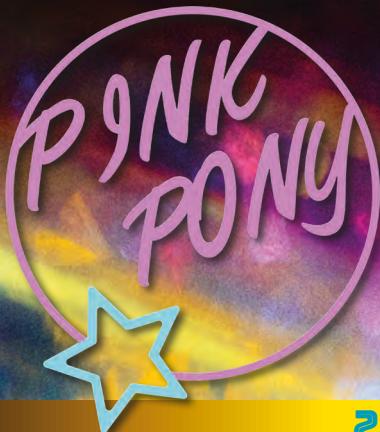
FAMILY BAR

HAPPY PRIDE

FROM THE TEAM AT FAMILY, SALOON, G.A.Y & PINK PONY!



SEPARATE SMOKING SECTION / NO COVER CHARGE / GAY OWNED & OPERATED / OPEN 7 DAYS / 270 KARANGAHAPE RD / PH 09 309 0213



FRI - SAT  
9PM TO LATE

\$10  
DRINKS

260 - 262 KARANGAHAPE ROAD



FRI-SAT 10PM-4AM  
DRAG SHOWS 1:30AM