



ABOUT THE COMPANY

For more than sixteen years Black Grace has delighted global audiences with its spirit, passion, and unique point of view. A fusion of traditional Pacific cultures and contemporary dance, Black Grace is an extension of the personal history of its founder and choreographer, Neil Ieremia.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Blending artistic expression with an energetic physicality is one of Black Grace's foundations. So is a desire to explore. Everything begins somewhere.

"I build simple movements into phrases and patterns that I can then communicate to the company. Dance is intuitive, but it's organized intuition. The movements make sense to me, and I have to trust that they'll connect with the company, and that together, we can make it connect with audiences," says Neil.

Like the Samoan tradition of *tatau* (tattoo, body art) where the skin and mark are one, so are the dancers and the space in which they dance. The dance forms are carved out of the space that surrounds them. "Sometimes the thing that interests me is the space between the dancers rather than the dancers themselves," says Neil.

What Black Grace makes comes from the unique sum of all its parts. From its location in the world of contemporary dance, from Neil Ieremia's relationship with his Samoan culture in his New Zealand home, from the points of view and energies of his company. "Sure, we are informed by all of that. But we have to be free to leave it all behind. We're the only ones standing in our way. I am simply a choreographer speaking what I find inside me; experiences and dreams about the world around me. I express this through dance."

NEIL IEREMIA, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Black Grace founder and Artistic Director Neil Ieremia is in the vanguard of New Zealand's most accomplished choreographers and, through his vision, imbues Black Grace with an explosive mix of rhythm, spirit and energy. Forming Black Grace in 1995 after working with many of New Zealand's leading dance companies, Neil has choreographed all of the Company's major full-length works and created the concepts behind "New Works", "Black Grace & Friends" and "UrbanYOUTHMovement". Neil has also choreographed work for the Royal New Zealand Ballet, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and Opera New Zealand.

"It's this combination of genuine passion and energy together with Ieremia's artistic direction and choreography, that makes such a brilliant fusing of Pacific and modern dance and Black Grace's signature style."

Inside New Zealand, 2005

In 2003 Neil was nominated for the prestigious international Rolex Mentor Programme. In recognition of his considerable achievements, Neil received the 2005 Arts Foundation of New Zealand Laureate Award. Neil directed the 2007 Cultural Traditions program at The School at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Massachusetts. In 2009 Neil accepted a Resolution passed by the Guam Legislator in recognition of his work in Guam. Neil is a 2009 recipient of the Paul D. Fleck Fellowship in the Arts from The Banff Centre, Canada. On the recent 2010 North American Tour, the Mayor of Honolulu, Hawaii officially proclaimed February the 6th 2010 "Black Grace Day" in Honolulu.

"He (Neil Ieremia) has spread his artistic roots in several rich pasts and grown up and out into a sunlight of his own making."

Jennifer Dunning, The New York Times, 2004

TOURING REPERTORY PROGRAM

A RETROSPECTIVE 60 minutes plus

A show made up of shorter works spanning the last seventeen years including *Minoi*, *PatiPati* and excerpts from *Objects* and *Amata*. There is space within this programme to include a longer excerpt of brand new work currently in development entitled *Waka* (the Maori word for canoe) inspired by the painting "The Arrival of Maori" by Louis J. Steele and Charles F. Goldie 1898.

MINOI (1999) 5 minutes

Minoi is about the fusion of a traditional Samoan dance style known as Fa'ataupati (slap dance) and western contemporary dance as a means of exploring cultural identity issues. The traditional Samoan dance culture utilises live singing and vocalisations which I have also incorporated into this work by re-arranging a traditional Samoan song and combining it with a popular western tune remembered from Jeremiah's childhood.

Music: *Minoi Minoi* (traditional Samoan song), re-arranged by Neil Jeremiah

OBJECTS (2004) 15 minutes

Premiering at Jacobs Pillow in 2004, *Objects* explores themes of cultural displacement and dislocation. The original idea for the work was inspired by the poem *A Journey Towards Blue* written by Samoan writer Sia Figiel. The movement vocabulary is an abstraction of the narrative that tracks the story of a Samoan family taken from their village in Samoa (circa 1904) and displayed in a Zoo in Germany, as part of the "Human Zoo" phenomenon popular in Europe in the late 1800s. Since making this work in 2003-2004, more research material and resources have become available. In revisiting *Objects*, Jeremiah hopes to reflect the impact of this information in this new version.

PATI PATI (2009) 10 minutes

This work is a mixture of excerpts from older repertoire that utilise body percussion influenced by traditional Samoan Sasa (seated dance) and Fa'ataupati (slap dance). Movement segments, dance phrases and motifs have evolved from past full-length works, including; *Relentless*, inspired by children's hand games as well as gestures taken from personal stories about child abuse (1998); the self-titled debut season *Black Grace*, a work exploring male stereotyping in the Pacific (1995); *Fia Ola*, a piece about the challenges Pacific Islanders face when they leave their traditional homes to settle in New Zealand (1998); and *Amata*, a work choreographed for 12 women (2007).

Music: Original music from *Surface*, by Neil Jeremiah and Juse of Woodcut Productions

AMATA ACT 3 – A NEW BEGINNING 20 minutes

The compositional structure and floor patterns are based on a traditional weaving pattern found in Samoan fine mats made from flax called "ie toga." This work also acknowledges the importance of change. *Amata*, Act 3 is fast and rhythmically rich with a soundtrack featuring music by New Zealand composer Jack Body and rare traditional Polynesian recordings.

WAKA working title, duration TBC

* This is a full-length work that can be split into sections and performed as part of a mixed works programme.

Currently in development, "Waka" (the Maori word for canoe) is inspired by the painting "The arrival of Maori" by Louis J. Steele and Charles F. Goldie 1898 based on Theodore Géricault's famous 'The Raft of the *Medusa*', which depicts the terror of a shipwreck, this is one of New Zealand's best-known historical paintings. *Waka* will explore traditional navigation practices, migration rituals and ceremonies of leaving, personal stories of migration, the impact of a new environment on traditional cultural practice and how a new generation is successfully straddling the past and present.

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

MASTER CLASS

1.5 hours

Led by Neil Ieremia or company members, class begins with a warm up and is followed by dance students learning aspects of company repertory.

CONVERSATION WITH NEIL IEREMIA

Neil Ieremia talks about his work process.

REVIEWS

'This is a show that makes you glad to be alive.'

The Australian, 2003

'... an amazingly eclectic mix, delivered with huge style, sincerity and humour.'

New Zealand Herald

'... they managed to devise a program that was artistically serious, entertaining and at times even riotously amusing.'

Melbourne Dance Critic, 2003

'New Zealand Company Breaks Out and Soars.'

Jennifer Dunning New York Times, 2004

"(Neil Ieremia) has spread his artistic roots in several rich pasts and grown up and out into a sunlight of his own making."

Jennifer Dunning, New York Times, 2004

'The New Zealand-based all-male troupe can rock the house with thundering stomps, macho body slaps in syncopated rhythms, and acrobatics that send the dancers crashing into one another. Yet they can just as convincingly sing in sweet three-part harmony, accompanying their vocals with gestures that softly curve and dip.'

Karen Campbell The Boston Globe, 2008

'... what we see for now should be grabbed for the beauty it is: raw, authentic, and still unspoiled

by outside influence.'

Alison Tracy Berkshire Eagle, 2008

"It's unabashedly virile, dangerous and terrifically exciting".

The Ottawa Citizen, 2008

"Black Grace performs exciting, high-octane dance that is bruising and punishing in its physicality – an explosive combination of Samoan ritual, martial arts and daredevil risk-taking."

globeandmail.com, Toronto, 2008

"... magnificent, combining physicality, energy and gracefulness into an impressive and original dance style."

Adelaide Advertiser, 2008

"The New Zealand Company Black Grace enchanted and enthralled the audience on their first European tour with exceptional choreography: a thrilling bond between ceremonial dances of Maori and immigrants from Samoa, and an athletic form of modern dance."

Main Post, Schweinfurt, Germany, 2009

"Minoi exemplified the versatility of these artists, who transition seamlessly from surprisingly rapid percussive motions to graceful sweeps of the limbs."

Berkshire Living, Massachusetts, 2010

“In a memorable performance, the thrilling and brilliantly executed New Zealand company Black Grace integrated many aspects of modern dance with Samoan and South Pacific indigenous dance forms. The result was no cut-and-paste assemblage, but a new art form.”

Broad Street Review, Philadelphia, 2010

“Neil Ieremia, Black Grace’s Artistic Director, has the necessary choreographic skill to shape movement that can reflect the complexity of Bach’s polyphony. Mark Morris possesses a similar finesse with music and dance, though Ieremia was not afraid to add concept and imagery to his exploration of the score. The movement and the music were compelling in their own right, yet Ieremia surpassed his peers by adding a narrative dimension.”

Ballet-Dance Magazine, Virginia, 2010

“Their movement, though distinctive, demonstrated that dance is a shared understanding; culturally and stylistically.”

Ballet-Dance Magazine, Virginia, 2010

“A polished, pungent, bone-crunchingly physical and perfectly executed alchemy of music, muscle and motion.”

New Zealand Herald, 2010