



"The oldest gang in New Zealand"

Above The Howard Morrison Quartet in their earlier days, resplendent in hair cream and shiny suits. In the late 50s they were a long way from the smooth professionalism that was to become their hallmark, but even then they projected an excitement that must be described as star quality.

Below In action at Kimiora, 21 years later. They're still on top, and the magic is still very much in evidence. Howard, far left, manages to combine his talents as an entertainer with his duties as Director of Youth Development, Department of Maori Affairs. Noel Kingi, next to him, has left show business and lives in Rotorua, where he works for the Forestry Service. Gerry Merito, on guitar, is now Auckland-based. He's still in entertainment, and is as funny and popular as ever. At the right is Wi Wharekura, who after ten years in Australia has returned to Rotorua, where he is host, manager and entertainer at the Tudor Towers.

On tour

Theirs has proved to be a continuing commitment. From that first show has emerged a nationwide tour of concerts. Again, local schools are involved, local people are offering their assistance. The touring party now includes Eddie Low, a ballad singer as much at home in Nashville, home of country music, as in his native Rotorua. Tina Cross is also appearing, lending her unique style and vitality to the show. Toni Williams replaces Wi Wharekura, who has unfortunately been unable to go along, but Toni is very much an "old boy" of the Quartet, and has sung with them from their very earliest days.

For those who weren't able to be at Ngaruawahia, this all-Maori show is visiting as many centres as possible to provide an evening's entertainment (and in some places two or even three).

Tu Tangata in action

But the tour represents more than an evening out. It is focusing attention on Tu Tangata, and indeed it is itself a fine example of Tu Tangata in action. Apart from their evening concerts, the performers are working closely with local communities to visit schools and workplaces during the day. An exhausting schedule, but one which will be appreciated by all those parents, Maori or Pakeha, who care for their children's future.

The man behind it

The man at the front of the show was also the man behind it — Howard Morrison. He and his Quartet have been a legend in New Zealand since before many of his newer fans were born. His success has not been limited to New Zealand alone, as his recent trip to the United States for the "Come on to New Zealand" promotion showed.

But international stardom has not blunted Howard's awareness of his own roots or numbed his sensitivity to the needs of others, particularly the Maori people. In fact success and acclaim have highlighted for him the lack of similar opportunities which others have to face. Perhaps this explains his long interest in youth work, and his eagerness to join the Department of Maori Affairs under new Secretary Kara Puketapu. He was first appointed as youth consultant on a contract basis; the contract was extended, and then March 1979 saw his appointment as Director of Youth Development.

Tu Tangata has provided Howard with a most challenging opportunity to combine his interests for the good of New Zealand's youth. he says: "We may not be able to influence their future, but we can certainly be concerned with their growth through attention, encouragement and most importantly multi-racial awareness."

