

Christina Ngahuia WHO?

Most of the 420,000-plus viewers who watch TV1 at 6.00 p.m. every Saturday evening haven't the faintest idea who Christina Ngahuia Asher is. To them she's probably little more than a pair of legs (though a very busy pair) and a smiling face (though a very attractive one). She is one of the Ooomph Dancers, who enliven the popular show "Ready to Roll". She's also a Maori, and for that reason we decided to approach her for an interview . . .

"Ngahuia. Don't forget the Ngahuia."

"Sorry, Christina Ngahuia Asher." Not only has she told me her name, but she's also answered a question I was saving for later. Now there's no need to ask her how she feels about being Maori; it is obvious from the pride with which she insists on her middle name, her Maori name.

She continues in the same vein: "Both my grandfathers were Ngaiterangi, and my grandmother on my mother's side was Nga Rauru, a Mete-Kingi. On my father's side she was from Ngati Tuwharetoa."

Christina had been cautious about an interview, and she had even asked for the weekend to think it over. But she's

turned up anyway, dressed in dazzling colours and with a large piece of greenstone dangling from one ear. She's also brought along her five-year-old son Kayne. Now there's no stopping her as she warms to her subject — not herself, but her people.

"We had a great Easter, a family reunion at Te Puke. Three thousand people were there, *three thousand!* In spite of the petrol shortages."

Born in Wanganui twenty-five years ago, she moved with her parents and her two brothers to Tawa, in the Hutt Valley, when a young child. Her parents were both teachers, and both belong to the Ratana Church. So how did she come to be a dancer?

"My mother sent me to dancing classes when I was seven. I was always very clumsy, always falling over things. I certainly learned how to dance, but I'm still clumsy. I'm the one in the troupe who can't keep still when I'm supposed to. Anyway, I really hated those classes, but Mum played the piano at the dancing school so I had to turn up." She pops a peppermint Oddfellow into her mouth.

Now, of course, she doesn't regret those early years. In fact, she encourages other kids along to classes. Christina is a teacher herself, specialising in modern and jazz dancing and tap at the Dance Centre in Wellington. She has been particularly impressed by the talent of her Maori pupils: "Young Maori kids today can really dance." Ever since *Saturday Night Fever* they've come flocking. She feels, however, that they don't do justice to their ability, and after they've learned the basics of disco they go away and don't come back.

With her teaching commitments as well as TV work, life is pretty hectic. Each routine for "Ready to Roll", lasting perhaps no more than three minutes, demands ten hours of careful and exhausting rehearsal, and of course there's

