

"Perhaps our tipuna lie watching..."

He korero enei mo nga kapa haka o nga rohe o Aotearoa i haere ki te
whakataetae i te Waipounamu . . .

What flashes through your mind as you stand awaiting the leader's call?

Te Whakaeke: I feel numb. detached. Yet I know this will not last long. As much as I try to focus there is no central point. It eludes me. My mind is there yet it is not. My senses stretch out, touching, savouring. The air draws in like a pump. The faint odour of hangi catches itself in my nostrils. There's sweat too and the smell of people. Closeness. All around.

Upwards I look, the sky bunched — foreboding yet strangely comforting. A reflected image beyond words lies there, inner feelings mirrored. The desire, the aggression — te riri. Looking there strengthens me; perhaps tipuna lie watching in the folds of the clouds. Perhaps Ranginui himself will be shook from his slumber. The eruption. We are the same before nature — me to the earth to the sky and back.

The blackout is near, everything's transformed into energy. I ride the verge of control, the edge, and feel the yawning abyss beyond — the void between control and uncontrolled. The sentry's word brings me past the edge and to the source. Wairua light. Images of moko and feather, taiaha and mere.

I see my face chiselled. I see my body rippling to an inner beat. Arms savage. Torso writhing. Legs stumped dirt-flicking. The sounds are hideous. Beautiful. Quivering. It ends and still I float beyond the wairua light. The source. From where does it come?

Te Waiata Tawhito: I feel so small, a speck in the sky, insignificant when these words hit me. This waiata, so sad. That we, nga tama me nga kotiro, pouring forth our emotion are merely slaves.

Chris Winitana (pictured), a Tu Tangata writer and Waiariki tutor, has contributed most of the coverage of the Polynesian festival.

In this short story he tells how it can feel to be a performer.

Mokai. With nothing. The tears well up as the words dance before me. Us. Te rangatahi. Looking for something to hold to, perhaps the mana of the old ways. Looking for guidance.

But do we find it? Aiii! I don't have to think of the words, I feel them etched in place. The feelings smother me. Here we are, naked but for our souls, before the jewelled cloak of Rangi. Dark now as he is. As the clouds form and reform as if affected by our breaths. Ready to shed rain. Tears for us. Mokai.

I feel the weight, I feel the lightness. The two extremes tied into one. Ko wai au? Ko wai au? Who am I? He mokai ke? A slave?

Te Poi: Like a lover caressing a face, it floats through the air. Twisting and turning, diving and soaring. Perhaps a tail-flicking piwaiwaka. Perhaps a gust of wind frolicking amongst the clouds. Perhaps a woman. Flirtatious. Beautiful to the pulse. Hypnotising. Enticing.

Soothing it is to watch. The grace, the femininity. Te hu o te wahine. The soft for the hard. Wondrous. Dextrous. The poi move together as if worked by a single mind. Yet there are so many. Truly a marvel. Many bodies. Many hands. But one mind. The common wairua.

Te Waiata-a-Ringa: My pulse quickens. It's the word and the action in unison — Maori sign language. They feel pure and clearcut. The throat is dry, the voice slightly rasped — no time to rejuvenate itself. But the harmony is there. Of sound and mind. There's a relaxed feeling — a good sign. The time and dimension from where the words came start to settle in.

We sing of the wind, the chisel of Rangi, which tattoos the face of Papa. The pathways of our destiny. We sing of the mountains, the song of Tane, the vantage point of the gods. We sing of the trees, the examples they offer us to help understand the nature of man. To the houhi we go to ask how to stabilise enduring love in mankind. Nature is our mentor. We touch each other — us, the

people, the world, the universe.

Te Kokiri: It rises. It rises. The heat. I feel the power building. We go out to take the fight. Te ha o te tangata. Energy building like a force-field around us. We the centre. Protected in mind. The energy reaching out. Hackling hair. Trapping us. No escape. Calm. The lull before the storm.

Te Haka: No one could stop it, even if they wanted to. The awesomeness. The emotion. The mindpower of which we are part. The unseen hands guiding us. We feel it. Tipuna calling. Dragging us along. Burning to the touch. My thoughts are at once scattered and together. There is nothing between myself and me. The thunder beat. The voice wind which calms. Imprinted. A slave to it. Willingly. The men are straining against it. I feel their will. They wanting to break through. Out of control. I sweat with the effort of wills. I sweat to control. There's no turning back. He waka taua, te hokowhitu a Tu. Deadly. We are male and we are Maori.

Te Whakawatea: We leave you drained, people of the land. Yet replenished. Our spirits soar though our bodies quiver with fatigue. Our voices are but memories, long snatched by the wind, our throats an empty vessel. Yet we are free. Freed of our shackles, if only for a moment. Our wairua. We have won. We have won. The glory is ours. The stage stretches before us. The audience diminishes. They know us now. They have tasted our ihi.

The skies open — Ranginui awake and sobbing. The wetness cools our skins. Cools the fire. It drips through our hair. We feel the cloak of our tipuna slipping away — glad they lived again we are. But we will catch that elusive spirit again. For we have won. No prizes. No trophies. Just us. We each have won. We each have basked in the light of another space. Our spirits renewed. The wairua light.

The source we sought.

It is us.

We have won.