Welcome back!

Welcome back to our regular updates, where we share what's been happening across the Touch Compass whānau - performances, projects, people, and everything in between.

In this update:

- **(((ORO:RESONANCE)))** - a new pilot programme enabling rangatahi disabled makers to create sound for theatre performances, to be danced by established and emerging dancers at Basement Theatre
- **Artist reflections:** The double-bill showcase of ABILITOPIA + WHITE NOISE
- **Around our Compass** on the question *"Why do you still have sign language at your shows even when there's no Deaf people in the audience?"*

ARTIST REFLECTION: ABILITOPIA + WHITE NOISE takes the Stage at Te Pou Theatre

ABILITOPIA + WHITE NOISE lit up live and loud (iykyk) at Te Pou Theatre in late February.

ABILITOPIA, directed by Suzanne Cowan, with creative collaborators Adam Ben-Dror (Robotics) Kristian Larsen (Sound) and Rachel Marlow (AV/Lighting), Emma Willis (Dramaturg) and dancers Duncan Armstrong, Julie van Renen and Raven Afoa-Purcell invited audiences into a bold exploration of disability, identity, power, and imagined futures.

WHITE NOISE, brought to life by Alisha McLennan Marler with creative collaborators Jessie McCall (co-choreo) Drew McMillan (Sound), and Brad Gledhill (AV/Lighting/Set) and inspired by her lived experience as a mother with disability, offered an intimate and

unapologetic journey through parenthood, perception, and social rebellion.

Together, these thought-provoking performances captivated audiences, celebrating creativity, strength, and artistic voice - seen and unseen, heard and unheard.

Suzanne Cowan, Director of ABILITOPIA, shares her reflections below on presenting as part of the TOUCH COMPASS double-bill performance ABILITOPIA + WHITE NOISE.

Presenting these works at was a powerful reminder of what we strive to do: create space for disabled artists to ask complex questions through movement, design, and collaboration.

SUZANNE:

“ABILITOPIA explored the complicated relationship between disability and artificial intelligence. Like many people, I have mixed feelings about AI. There are serious ethical and social concerns surrounding how it is being developed and deployed. At the same time, disabled people have long adapted and repurposed technologies in creative ways to expand communication, participation, and artistic expression. The work was less about celebrating AI than asking what might happen if disabled people were actively involved in shaping how these technologies evolve.

Working with *Duncan Armstrong, Raven Afoa-Purcell, and Julie van Renen* was a deeply collaborative process. Together with the robot design-led by *Adam Ben-Dror* and a soundscape mixed live by *Kristian Larsen* against an atmosphere created by *Rachel Marlow*, the performers explored shifting relationships between human and machine, sometimes extending one another’s presence and sometimes creating tension or unease. I was interested to read in a recent review that the performance left audiences with questions rather than clear answers. That felt right to me. Often the most meaningful art doesn’t resolve complexity—it invites us to sit with it.”

WHITE NOISE offered a very different exploration of presence and perception. Seeing both works together highlighted the breadth of artistic voices within Touch

Compass and the ongoing importance of disability-led performance in shaping how we imagine the future.

Around our Compass

WHY NZSL? | ORO | Blind Sport Survey

WHY NZSL when there are no d/Deaf?

Touch Compass Kaiwhakahaere Mātua JT reflects on a question he was asked during the recent double-bill season at Te Pou Theatre ...

“Why do you still have sign language at your shows,

when there’s no Deaf people in the audience?”

“Fair question. In light of the current political climate.
If there’s no one to use it, why pay for it? Obvious cost-cutting opportunity, right?

At Touch Compass, access isn’t an add-on. It is not a box we tick. It is part of who we are. We begin every work planning for it. We budget for it. We do it - every time, every show. We don’t decide for you which of our shows are accessible. We let you decide knowing that EVERY Touch Compass show is accessible. It doesn’t matter how many Deaf people are in the room. Whether there are 50 or 5, or 0 Deaf people. We still ensure that access for our dialogue-driven shows, and audio description for our visual dance performances. This is about more than money. It is about culture. NZSL is an official language of Aotearoa. It stands alongside Te Reo Māori.Facts!

We recognise it’s more than just a mode of communication. It’s a language.

A way a culture connects and expresses themselves. We’ve built a kaupapa here that honours identity and access. That honours different cultures equally. Disability culture. Māori culture. Pasifika culture. Tangata Tiriti culture. Deaf culture has as much right to be recognised as any other. It’s also another way we honour our principles, Te Tiriti - Ōritetanga - equity. We actively support this, aligned with UNCRPD and EGL and our own five pillars. These are important promises. They say access is a right, not an invite. Not some favour when it’s convenient.

It’s not just about access, it’s also about art. The movement of hands and bodies through air has long been a feature of dance and theatre performance. Witness Kelly and the team at Platform Interpreting NZ perform a show alongside us. For that matter, listen to the audio descriptions provided by Nicola and her Audio Described Aotearoa whanau who ensure our blind and low vision whanau can access the art in their own way. These methods articulate the art and help remove barriers. These are essential ingredients to the flavour of each work.

Sign language is beautiful. It’s a really present and powerful form of communication. A physical interpretation of time, place, and purpose that adds a new layer to the performance. A visual poetry. It makes the show better for everyone. Now let me be absolutely clear here, we don’t speak for d/Deaf or Blind and low vision artists and audiences, equally we do not wait to be told to provide access just ‘cause someone ticked the right box at ticket purchase. Access for all should be a given instead of an ask or accommodation. We do not count heads before we welcome you. Access is part of who we are. It is not ‘other’.

We believe time, space, and place for creative expression is for everyone. We belong on these stages. You belong here with us. A registration for an ‘accessible’ ticket does not decide that. We strive to ensure you are welcome at any point in our performance

seasons not just some designated date and time. Whatever your culture. Whatever your way of leaning differently in the wind.You're welcome, every time."

- JT

We aim to provide the most accessible arts in Aotearoa, if you've got some new ideas on how access within arts can be improved, let us know at access@touchcompass.org.nz

TIX HERE! Get your tickets for the 24 April ORO LIVE SHOWING here!

***He oro pūmau, he wairua ora*.**

Resonant sound. Living spirit.

ORO:RESONANCE is a new pilot programme from us where disabled rangatahi sound creators (aged 16+) develop original audio pieces exploring memory, identity, rhythm, under the wing of disabled composer and sound designer Drew McMillan.

Session by session since March these awesome audio creators learned new and accessible sound recording and editing skills resulting in brand new sound works for theatre performance.

Six new works have been gifted to a collective of established and emerging dance-theatre artists - disabled, non-disabled, including Rodney Bell, Alisha McLennan Marler, Julie van Renen and Adus Smith who are working closely with young and hungry emerging dance performers, a number from University of Auckland and Unitec dance programmes.

New sounds resonate with new life and become the starting point for movement and storytelling.

You can witness the magic for yourself!

A work in progress showing of a series of these new works will be presented in partnership with BASEMENT THEATRE this Friday night.

TICKETS: Tickets to the show are Pay What You Can, so come along and support the next generation of disabled creators and dancers. Join us at the Basement for this unique intimate programme of short works (each work is just 3-4 minutes each), followed by a relaxed post-show kōrero with the some of the artists / creators / dancers.

Learn more about the ORO:RESONANCE programme here:
https://www.touchcompass.org.nz/oro-resonance-sound-creation-programme-for-disabled-rangatahi-young-adults

Learn more about access at BASEMENT THEATRE:
https://basementtheatre.co.nz/pages/access

Around our Compass

Blind Sport NZ is inviting parents and whānau of children with a vision impairment to answer the Blind Sport NZ Whanau Survey, link here. You're welcome to fill it out on your own, or together with your child (and even welcome if your child is now an adult!).

Blind Sport NZ want to understand what influences you and the child's choice to take part in sport and active recreation and what support or information would be most helpful. Your feedback will help shape future training and a new online resource hub.

If you'd rather share your answers by email or WhatsApp, you can reach Blind Sport NZ at admin@blindsport.kiwi or 022 599 3961 and they can send a list of the questions asked in the survey.

Donate Today!

Your support makes a difference!

Believe in a future where professional disabled artists and the next generation don’t just participate, they lead.

Right now, your donation can help us continue to create world-class, disability-led work that inspires the next generation not just to dream, but to do.

By supporting our artists and development programmes, you're fuelling a creative ecosystem where emerging talent takes the spotlight and belongs there.

Make change happen. By backing excellence, creating pathways, and reimagining the possible with us.

Donate today and help us shape a future led by lived experience!

👉 **DONATE HERE NOW**

All donations over $5.00 are tax-deductible.

Touch Compass Dance Trust is a registered charitable trust and donee organisation.
Charities Services #CC23088

Touch Compass

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