**Not in our Neighbourhood**

**Programme notes**

Not in Our Neighbourhood shares a stunning series of stories about domestic violence against women.

Written and told in the style of a staged documentary, Not in our Neighbourhood is a one-person play that follows the lives of Sasha Miller, Cat Mihinui and Teresa Cummings living together in “The Safehouse.” Maisey Mata, a filmmaker, has been invited to the Women’s Refuge to follow some of their clients in a bid to raise awareness about violence towards women.

Written & Directed by Jamie McCaskill (Bruce Mason Award Winner 2013 for his acclaimed play Manawa), Not in our Neighbourhood takes a close look behind the mask of domestic violence – the despair, the misguided loyalties, the pain and hope.

While working at the Hauraki Women’s Refuge, Jamie McCaskill was able to study and observe victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. He was then asked to write a play, which veered away from stereotype and the usual perception of domestic violence in NZ, and to present it in a way that would have the audiences informed, challenged and moved by their theatrical experience.

The play stars Kali Kopae who takes on multiple roles throughout. In 2008 Kali was involved in creating He Reo Aroha with Tawata Productions a production that showcases her original music. Most recently Kali was on stage in Hikoi, Nancy Brunning's work for the Auckland Arts Festival 2015.

**Descriptive notes**

These notes have been provided by Audio Described Aotearoa Ltd based on a recording of a rehearsal. They are intended to be read by blind and low vision patrons prior to the show to enhance understanding of the visual elements of the performance. They introduce the performers, costume, set, and lighting and describe how the use of mime and facial expression indicates the nature of the action where this is not apparent from the script.

**Description**

Not in our Neighbourhood is an hour long show that follows Maisey Mata, a filmmaker, who has been invited to the Women’s Refuge to follow some of their clients and make a documentary film of the women there in a bid to raise awareness about domestic violence.

The stage is set in traverse – that means that the audience are on the two long sides of the stage facing each other. There are just a few pieces of furniture on the stage – four wooden chairs placed two at each end facing the two at the other end and about a dozen standard lamps and table lamps that are set on the floor. The action often appears to be lit only by the lamps, giving the stage a dim, claustrophobic feeling. The play is mostly lit by domestic house lamps so at no stage is there a big wash of bright light. When Maisey is filming clients in a scene, domestic lighting is used. If she isn't present the difference is distinguished by the use of 3 spots from the roof, side lighting and gobos which are stencils placed on the lights that control the shape of the emitted light. In Cat's court scene there is a special light on that is cold grey wash on her.

The action takes place in a number of settings: the refuge; an MPs office; a café; a WINZ office; a courthouse; a pub. Changes of scene are indicated by references to location in the script, and are reinforced by music, or the characters moving one or more of the chairs. For example: the scene in the WINZ office is indicated by the dialogue; in the court scene, Cat gives her victim impact statement standing behind two of the chairs as if she is in a witness dock in the court. Sometimes a character turns the chair she is sitting on during longer monologues – this seems to indicate a passing of time between sections of filming, but also is a practical way of ensuring that sections of the audience are not seeing the actor’s back for the whole speech.

Maisey and the other five female characters are all played by Kali Kopae, making this effectively a one-woman show. Throughout the performance Kali wears loose khaki trousers and a white collarless blouse unbuttoned at the neck. Her straight black hair is tied back from her face but hangs long over her shoulders. She doesn’t change costume at all in the show. She defines the different characters by changing her voice, giving each character a different accent, volume, and vocabulary and also in the way she holds herself and moves in the space.

Here are the features of the characters in the order they appear:

Maisey Mata the young Maori filmmaker who talks first is lithe and supple, sitting cross-legged in a chair as she speaks clearly and articulately. Her movements as she sets up her tripod are precise and professional. Although she only speaks and appears in person at the start and end of the production, her presence is implicit in many scenes, and we are often reminded of her existence by references to her filming or half conversations that seem to be answering questions that she has asked to elicit information for the documentary.

Moira, a middle aged Maori woman who works in the women’s refuge, is an animated, blustery character with a broad accent.

Cat, an older Maori woman is withdrawn and quiet. Her shoulders are hunched and she doesn’t make eye contact. Her character is introduced in a mime accompanied by slow piano music that happens between Moira’s first two monologues. In the mime, Cat appears to go through her daily routine at the house in a slow stylised dance-like fashion without speaking.

Sasha, a younger pakeha woman is boisterous and foulmouthed and appears much bigger than Cat. She pouts and poses and waves her arms wildly or folds them firmly across her chest to demonstrate her frustration. She seems to always be moving and lashing out with her gestures and words.

Teresa, an older pakeha woman is well spoken, tense, upright, and still. The tension in her relationship with her husband is apparent from the nervousness with which she talks to her friend, but is most clearly exposed at the end of the café scene when her husband arrives and the look on her face quickly changes from nervous anticipation to fear.

Carol, a friend of Teresa who only appears in the café scene, is positive and supportive of Teresa’s efforts.

The only character who appears in person but is not played by Kali is David, Teresa’s husband. He is tall and lean with greying hair and a quick and fierce temper. He wear navy blue pants and a white shirt. He does not appear in the café scene when he is first mentioned, or a later scene when Teresa phones him, but he does appear in person when he confronts Moira at the refuge.

There are many characters implicit in the dialogue who do not appear in person, for example: the MP’s secretary; the MP; the police; the WINZ office staff; the rest of Teresa’s friends in the café. Most are indicated only by the dialogue, but in some instances the action involving these characters is acted out. In the scene with Sasha’s children she mimes holding her youngest daughter in her left arm before putting her down on the floor. In the pub scene she dances in a sexualised way, miming a lapdance on an imaginary stranger’s knee and then mimes being dragged out of the pub by her boyfriend, and later on at his house, mimes being hit and hitting him back. In a later scene there is no dialogue as Sasha walks across the stage, miming having her wrists cuffed behind her and stumbling slightly as though being pushed roughly by a police officer.

The majority of the story and action can be guessed from the dialogue. The few exceptions to this are the mimed actions or particular facial expressions that have been specifically described above.