

Bowie zaps Takapuwahia locals

Hiria Rakete

The Ngati Toa people of Porirua, really pulled one out of the hat when they welcomed David Bowie onto the Toa Rangatira marae, during the Bowie world tour late last year.

Bowie especially asked to be taken on a marae to find out more about Maori people.

More than 300 locals turned up at the Titahi Bay Marae; young fans, old fans, and some who had never heard of him before.

It was an historic occasion for the Ngati Toa people, and also for David Bowie who had never visited a marae before.

But the traditional welcome went almost according to plan, and the Bowie entourage described it as "magic".

The only hitch was that the traditional hongis were missed out because the children swarmed onto the marae.

An elder of the marae, Mrs Charlotte Solomon, said the request for the visit came like a bolt out of the blue, but the people rose to the occasion.

And for the fans who turned out, there was an added bonus. They got to hear a Bowie original called 'Waiata', composed specially for the welcome.

Bowie needed to be boned up on how to conduct himself on a marae, so one of the local elders was invited up to his hotel room to brief him on what to expect.

Mr Puahou Katene explained the basics of the protocol only to find that Bowie had already done some homework and checked up on Maori history.

"David wanted to know when to speak, what to do, and especially when he'd have a chance to sing his composition.

"I told him we'd look after the more formal aspects in the welcome outside the meeting house, but his turn would come when we moved inside the house.

"I think he especially wanted to see a carved meeting house, and I was able to give him a booklet at the briefing explaining the significance of the carvings in the house."

Puahou admits to not being a fan of Bowie's before the visit but has now modified his views.

"David was very sincere and a great hit with the kids."

The marae has hosted other international people like jazz greats, Cleo Laine and John Dankworth, but David Bowie has especially left his mark on the minds of the Ngati Toa people.

"He looks so clean and fresh looking."
"I touched him, I touched him."



"He looked just like a Greek Adonis."

Ngati Toa elder, Charlotte Solomon said that the event was important for the young people of the area.

"They were told about the welcome some days before-hand, and had been asked to keep a lid on it, because we thought it might get out of hand. But the young people really made the night.

"The young people performed the haka, one of the boys did the wero, my daughter replied to the karanga and the Titahi Bay Intermediate School also performed."

She said Bowie's music obviously had a great impact on the young people and he was a lovely image for them to look up to.

"He really put us in touch with today, and we're better off for it."

Bowie was presented with a carved whale bone pendant and then thanked the people for the welcome.

"I am very honoured to be in a meeting house. It surely stands out as one of the most hospitable experiences in my life," he said.

His waiata, or song, then followed in three part harmony with another two members of his entourage.

It drew appreciative cheers from the people packed inside the meeting house.

The visiting party then sampled typical hangi food complete from puha to pavlova, and then returned to the meeting house for another hour of entertainment.

For David Bowie the marae welcome was an eye opener, but the parents of Ngati Toa also learnt something new about their children.

Puahou Katene. "They saw something that perhaps they'd never realised before, the magic of this man working on their kids."

