



Left to right: Maria Duffy, Kellee Rei, Teiana Everitt, Eteuati Ete, Samson Samasoni, Daniel Goddard, David Sa'ena, Mokalagi Tamapeau, above — Philip Patau

Taotahi ma uo explore the world

By Keri Kaa

The New Depot in Courtenay Place, Wellington, was the setting for a new play, "Le Matau The Hook", directed by Helen Jarroe and Stephen Sinclair. The play was a group effort, scripted, edited and workshopped by the players themselves, a group of Polynesian and pakeha friends who all worked together as Taotahi ma Uo, Taotahi and friends.

The original Taotahi was formed in 1980 when seven friends from Wellington High School — of maori, Samoan and Tokelauan descent — were encouraged by their English teacher Felicity Day to express their frustration and despair about being Polynesian in an urban environment through the medium of theatre. Darcy Nicholas, director of the Wellington Arts Centre, gave them a room at the centre.

They began by writing their ideas on large sheets of paper and pinning the sheets to the walls. With the aid of a tape recorder they would act out their ideas and feelings about the political and social issues which affected their lives, particularly racism. They also decided to restrict membership of the group to those young people of Polynesian descent only, feeling that the time was right for Polynesians to tell their own stories in their own way.

That summer the group were employed under the Summer Studentship scheme, two more friends from Wellington Boys and St Pat's Town joined them, and they were given the name "Kinetic Connotations". During the

Summer City Festival they wrote, directed and presented a play for children "The Santa Claus of Rangiora".

In their free time they wrote another play, "Atia", the story of a young Samoan/Maori boy and his struggle to cope with school, family and peer group pressures. "Atia" received a mixed reception wherever it was performed. Elders were confused by it, some found the harsh language and swearing offensive, teachers were upset by the classroom scenes, others loved it.

Taotahi gave almost one hundred performances of "Atia" in the Wellington region and then took it to Auckland in Easter of 1980. Since that time group members have been busy establishing themselves in careers ranging from journalism to teacher training to drama school.

Membership of the group has fluctuated but they keep in touch with one another. In 1982 they wrote and performed a new play called "The Empire" for the Waitangi Action Committee hui. They also participated in a weekend hui for maori artists and writers at

Hongoeka marae and produced a number of skits about contemporary life.

"Le Matau", their 1984 offering, took a year to create. Membership was extended to include people not of Polynesian descent, but that decision was reached only after long discussions. Hence the new name Taotahi ma Uo — Taotahi and Friends.

"Le Matau" is the story of a young Samoan male, Ioane, who comes to New Zealand to live and work. He joins his aunt and three New Zealand born cousins in a flat in suburbia and sets out on his erratic and painful journey. He has trouble finding a job, he doesn't speak acceptable English, he wears funny clothes. The traffic terrifies him, the hard streets hurt his feet and he discovers the pubs.

At home he is subjected to constant pressure to achieve great things, make lots of money, send money home to Samoa, go to church, give money to the church, and remember his obligations to his aiga, his whanau. He lands a job as clerk in a real-estate agency, struggles to maintain his own standards of honesty and decency, and discovers that smiles and charming fibs help sales along.

From that point on Ioane's rise to the top is inevitable, and he rapidly acquires all the trappings of the sophisticated and wealthy urban dweller. Smart clothes, dinners at elegant French restaurants, and he no longer