

# Taste of Japan in Auckland

Japanese culture and friendship with New Zealand were celebrated with a festival in Auckland. *Te Waha Nui* went along to taste the flavour. Story and pictures by RIDMA MENDIS.

Around 3000 people from different cultures gathered at Freemans Bay Community Centre to celebrate the Japanese cultural festival.

Vice-president of the New Zealand Japan Society of Auckland, Kumiko Imai-Duxfield, says the annual festival was organised to promote friendship and goodwill between New Zealand and Japan.

"You don't get many Japanese cultural experiences in Auckland. We wanted to give an opportunity for those who like to get a taste of Japanese culture to experience that," says Imai-Duxfield.

She was surprised at the number of the responses received from the public in reply to a newspaper advertisement for volunteers to help set up the August event.

"We asked for talented, culturally focused people and we had people from all nationalities responding to it. Some people who have had no association with Japanese culture were happy to help us out," she says.

Organising committee member Keiko Sakai, who has been in New Zealand for only five months, says it was

amazing to see the variety of cultures present at the festival.

"It's wonderful to have a Japanese cultural festival like this, not only for Japanese people but for everyone else to enjoy as well," says Sakai.

Enjoying the festival was Billy Mischefsky who was the youngest New Zealand serviceman based in Japan in 1947.

As a 15-year-old he fell in love with Japan and seized every opportunity to experience Japanese culture.

"We came from Hamilton for this festival. Japan is like a second home to me and it's great to be here and experience it again," Mischefsky says.

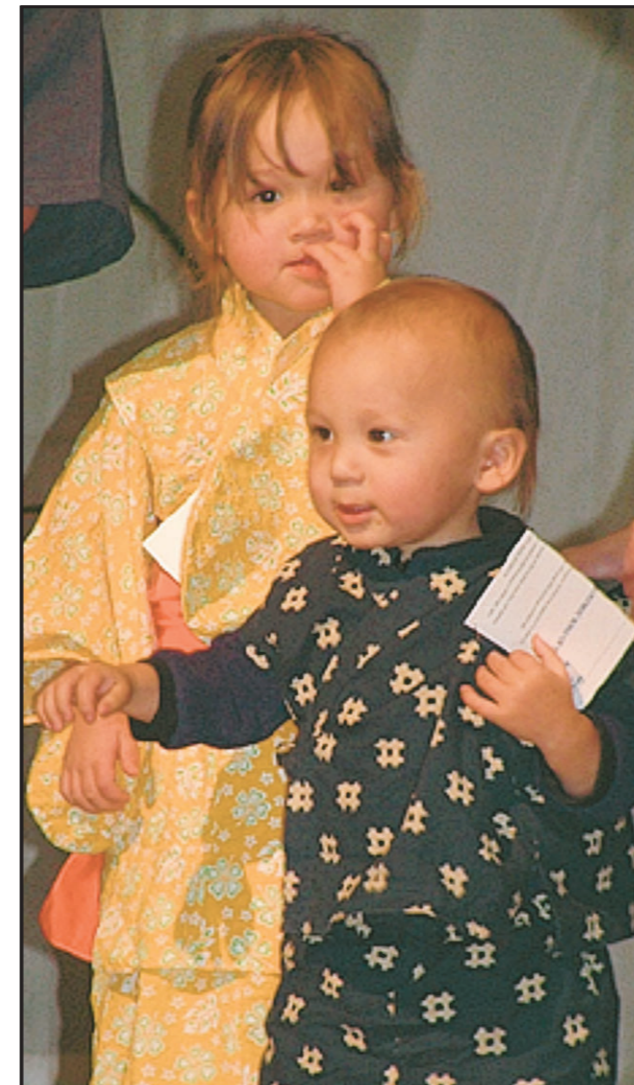
Traditional and contemporary Japanese dancing, music and aikido were among the stage performances.

Bonsai trees, Japanese pottery displays, origami workshops and a tea ceremony were among the other entertainments.

People from many cultures participated in the kimono competition—a highlight of the festival.

Auckland Mayor John Banks was among the guests. The New Zealand Japan Society of Auckland organised the festival.

It was sponsored by the Consul General of Japan, Auckland City and Gekkan New Zealand.



Japanese drumming with Haeremai and Auckland Mai Taiko clubs (left); demonstration by Waitakere aikido club (top right); authentic dance from Sakamoto (bottom right); origami training (below); Kasahara family band (below right); kimono competition (bottom).

