

Designer accuses Pasifika of 'cultural exploitation'

by Edward Gay

A designer has condemned this year's Style Pasifika as exploiting Pacific people.

Sara Tapaeru Minster says that although the festival organisers and sponsors use words such as Mana Pasifika and "strength, respect and pride", they are really concerned with the advertising revenue.

"My mum taught me to stand up for my anau (extended family) when I see them being mistreated and they have been by Westfield Style Pasifika, Drum Productions, and Stan Wolfgramm [producer]," says Tapaeru Minster.

Tapaeru Minster has written a formal letter of complaint to TVNZ's *Holmes Show* and *Tagata Pasifika* but she hasn't had a reply.

"It's hardly surprising given that TVNZ are televising the production and *Tagata Pasifika* sponsor the men's wear category of the show," she says.

But producer Stan Wolfgramm, who has been involved with the show for the past six years, rejected the criticism.

A crowd of about 3000 attended this year's show at the Auckland Town Hall. It will be broadcast by TVNZ on October 30.

Tapaeru Minster's complaints include the payment of models: "Two of my sisters were models and they were paid \$250 for 39

and a half hour's work - that's below the minimum wage."

She also says that the finalist designers were not given free tickets to the event.

"So finalists end up paying - both in time and money - for the clothes they make that make the show. And then they pay to attend the show," says Tapaeru Minster.

Tapaeru Minster went to the show, to see her sisters and clothes in the show.

"My sisters were great of course - but what was not great was that one of the models came out on stage wearing my most meticulously designed skirt back-to-front.

"I paid to enter the competition, I paid for the garments, I paid for tickets to see my garments in the show, and then they couldn't even pay me the respect of sending my clothes out properly."

Wolfgramm says he was unaware of Tapaeru Minster's complaints despite her and her friends being asked to move along by security as they handed out leaflets outside the Town Hall.

"She doesn't know anything about the show. It's an opportunity for Pacific models and performers. There's no other show for them," he says.

Asked about payment of the models, Wolfgramm said: "Those models come out of the shopping malls. They're there because they want to be there.

"We give tickets to the designers who don't get into the show. The finalists get enough - a certificate and recognition."

An experienced Pasifika model, who wished to remain nameless, criticised the European influence on the show.

"At the after party some people were saying the show is fronted by Europeans and that they couldn't identify with that. If you compare Pacific culture with Westfield shopping centre - they're two totally different worlds," she says.

"Just look at the audience - it was predominantly European and middle class."

But she still plans to continue working with Style Pasifika.

"Some of the young models have eating disorders. They were too afraid to eat during the fitting session. One of them said: 'If I eat this - I won't be able to fit into my costume.'

"I said: 'Hey, get a grip honey!'"

"Some of them tell me I'm the only one they can relate to because all the others are stick figures. That's why I'll continue to take part."

But Wolfgramm dismisses this as a stereotype.

"This is an ongoing battle. People stereotype Pacific people as dark brown - not just brown - size 20, and they should all be wearing grass skirts."

He says the entry form states that "sizes should reflect the community".



PERFORMANCE: Indian dance and culture combine.



WINNER: Traditionally inspired. Designed by: Tallulah Fillyo



HIGHLY COMMENDED: Overall. Designed by: Jennifer Jones

Pacific celebration set for major new development



FESTIVAL FUN: Popular Pasifika could be held over 10 days.



by Edward Gay

The Pasifika festival could fill up to 10 days of the Auckland cultural calendar if organisers can co-ordinate current Pasifika events into one annual festival.

Pasifika coordinator Mere Lomaloma Elliott says the festival could be increased from two-and a half days to 10 as early as 2008.

"We want a concentration of Pacific Island events on the calendar," says Elliott.

Plans have been made to hold a Pasifika playwright's forum and a film festival leading up to

the Pasifika festival in 2005. Other changes are set to come in 2008.

"We are planning to have the ASB Pollyfest finalists performing at the beginning of the festival."

The Pacific Islands Trade and Investment Commission is also planning to hold a trade expo.

Elliott says discussions are underway to include Pollyfest finalists, the commission's expo, the playwright's festival and film festival into the one event.

"We want to involve the whole region and this way Air New Zealand is able to do pack-

age deals so people can come from the Pacific during the festival," says Elliott.

Festival numbers were up by 20,000 this year to about 180,000. Elliott says a similar increase is expected next year.

The festival provides the Auckland Pacific Island communities with an opportunity to showcase their culture, art and food.

It also shows the wider Auckland community the diversity of Pacific Island culture.

"We try to bring together the youth culture and the traditional culture.

"The young people enjoy the hip-hop and rap music while the old people dance and listen to string guitars.

"But they mix. There's a place for both of them," says Elliott.

The Auckland City Council and the private sector provide sponsorship and some money is raised from stall holders.

One of the major costs is the clean-up, which costs \$20,000.

"Think of where I could channel that money. It's about changing people's attitudes and habits. We're employing bigger signage," says Elliott.

Elliott takes a practical

approach to the issue of rubbish. "If you keep your house clean, then for this weekend Western Springs is your house.

"Where I come from in Fiji, we have a day set aside for cleaning the village and another day set aside for cleaning the gardens," she says.

The 2006 Pasifika Festival will be held in March.

"Organising this festival is both a nightmare and a challenge.

"We're creating a sense of belonging - with something that everyone can identify with," says Elliott.