



# YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN THERE...

## **WHIRIMAKO BLACK, MIHIRANGI, BELLA KALOLO**

**Sounds Aotearoa, New Zealand  
Music Expo, New Plymouth  
Taranaki, March 10 2010**

With a superb selection of contemporary Maori women singers headlining the opening night of showcase performances at this inaugural New Zealand expo, it wasn't so much a question of who was best, but how so much talent can spring from one geographically isolated country at the bottom of the planet.

The opening act was the most enthralling. Veteran vocalist Whirimako Black, who featured on the *I Giant Leap* album, is equally at home singing jazz/soul standards or interpreting traditional Maori *waiata* (songs). On this night she was wonderfully highlighting the latter. Accompanied by renowned Kiwi ethnomusicologist Richard Nunns, who specialises in *ngā taonga puoro* (Maori traditional musical instruments), Black was in fine voice. With her commanding presence and distinctive *chin tā*

*moko* (tattoo), Whirimako is a striking performer and an embodiment of female Maori strength. Alternating a variety of whistles, nose flutes and minimalist percussion, Nunns' delicate – at times barely audible – instrumentation served to highlight the purity of Black's powerful vocals.

Next up was Australian-based Maori singer Mihirangi, who in recent years has mutated from a mostly acoustic singer-songwriter into a one-woman, tech-addicted 'Queen of Loops'. Electronically layering her own vocal harmonies with verbal basslines and percussive beat-boxing, she was able to build up extraordinary walls of sound that were both intriguing and constantly evolving. Imaginative, sassy and political, Mihirangi maintains deep respect for Maori traditions, while creating vocal experiments that are solidly 21st century.

And then newcomer Bella Kalolo walked on-stage. As her band kicked into gear, the formidably built young woman proudly proclaimed: "I'm gonna shake what my mama gave me!" and proceeded to do just that. With a voice big enough to endanger building

foundations, Kalolo's full-throated R&B repertoire combined a Tina Turner-ish edge with the might of Aretha in her prime. While a little more light and shade would have been welcome, it's impossible to tell a vocal hurricane like Bella to tone it down. Impressive!

*Seth Jordan*

## **FERUS MUSTAFOV & HIS WEDDING BAND**

**Danube Music Festival,  
March 24 2010**

This extraordinary concert took place on a ship heading north up the Danube from Novi Sad in Serbia towards Budapest in Hungary. Ferus Mustafiov is a clarinet and sax player and one of the great wedding musicians of the Balkans. Tonight he's playing an intimate gig with his band on the MS Sofia and then jamming with other musicians on board. He comes on in a creamy silver jacket and shiny black shoes and starts on clarinet by approaching and slowly serenading a lady in the audience. He plays her a warm, deep-throated melody to rapturous applause and then withdraws to the stage area to introduce