

# Sofija's Garden

By Renee Liang

Directed by Tainui Tukiwaho • Featuring Virginia Frankovich • Music Leon Radojkovic

“...a century-old dalmatian  
fairytale... magic with masks,  
music & puppetry”

## PROGRAMME

KOANGA  
FESTIVAL  
@TEPOUTHEATRE

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POU

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West  
WRITERS  
FESTIVAL





### Writer's note

I wrote this play for my children, Sofia and Luka. They are 50% Croatian, 50% Chinese and 100% Kiwi. The history of Croatians in Aotearoa is an extraordinarily proud one, full of stories of people who valued hard work, good food and above all, family. Croatians have been the backbone of many industries here – for example, horticulture, winemaking, construction – and yet the story of Croatians in NZ is rarely celebrated. As we know, stories are everything: they tell us who we are, where we come from and where we're going.

In 2017, Henderson Local Board called for proposals to write stories about West Auckland through its Outside The Square initiative. I saw the chance to create something special for my children, then aged 3 and 5 (you may recognise them in the play). *Sofija's Garden* was first read in front of a local audience in the church at Corban's Estate – as local as you can get.

In doing my research for this play, I owe a debt of gratitude to the volunteers at the Dalmatian Cultural Society, who welcomed a complete stranger who walked in on their regular Friday night gatherings; to Whare Mātauranga o Tāmaki Makaurau, the West Auckland Research Centre housed at Henderson Library where I listened to the excellent collection of oral history recordings from local Dalmatian settlers (sadly all men); and to my extended family, the Glucinas and the Lulichs, who have shared with me many anecdotes, including stories about Baba Sofija, the matriarch of our family. I hope that one day I can cook pasta shuta and whip together a family feast as well as she did.

Writing a play is one thing, but turning it into an experience that will move, delight and linger in the mind is another. It has been a joy and education watching Tai, Adam, Tuakoi and Tyler climb into the script and squish around in it (sometimes literally). Many eggs, rolls of toilet paper and crunchie bars have been sacrificed in our search for artistic truth. I hope you and your kids enjoy it.

### Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić – the Hans Christian Anderson of Croatia

Born in 1874 into a prominent family of lawyers and politicians, Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić started writing early, and as a young wife (with six children!) had articles and stories published in the journals of the day. Her book *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* (*Priče iz davnine*), published in 1916, has gained fresh fans in modern-day Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia because of its adaptation into films, animations and interactive digital series. In the book Mažuranić created a series of new fairy-tales, but using names and motifs from the Slavic mythology of Croats.

*Sofija's Garden* takes Mažuranić's much loved story, *Reygoch*, and retells it with all the action set in West Auckland, folded into a family tale of love, memory and nurturing the next generation.

If you'd like to read Mažuranić's work, a copy of *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* in English translation can be found at <https://publicdomainreview.org/collections/croatian-tales-of-long-ago-1922/>.

## Biographies

### Director: Tainui Tukiwaho *Te Arawa, Tūhoe*

Tainui Tukiwaho founded and runs Te Pou Theatre, the only Māori Theatre space in the world. He is an established theatre director, recently directing Albert Belz's *Astroman* at Q Theatre. As an actor he has multiple short films and television shows under his belt, including hosting Māori Television talk show *O Whakaaro*. In 2011 he took on the challenge of playing legendary entertainer Billy T James, for telemovie *Billy*. His other acting roles include *Tangiwai - A Love Story*, playing Dave's boss in TV series *Step Dave*, and co-starring in feelgood fishing movie *The Catch*, as a man trying to win a Kaipara fishing contest.



### Writer: Renee Liang (Glucina)

Renee, a Kiwi of Chinese descent, is passionate about stories. Her two greatest stories are currently aged 5 and 7 and provide the inspiration for a lot of her writing. Renee likes writing poems, short stories, plays, operas and musicals; collaborates on visual arts works, film, music, computer games and runs community events such as *The Kitchen*, bringing neighbours together with NZ writers to share food and stories. In 2019 she launched *When We Remember To Breathe*, a correspondence of motherhood with Michele Powles, and a children's play, *Sofija's Garden*. She also wrote episodes for a new children's audio series for Radio New Zealand, *What Will I Be Today?* (POW studios, currently in production). In 2018 she became a Member of the NZ Order of Merit for Services to the Arts and won Next Woman of the Year in the Arts and Culture category.

### Actor: Adam Rohe

Adam Rohe gets to spend all of his time doing whatever he wants. He is interested in surreal and absurdist works, and loves creating comic work with a dark underbelly. He really enjoys putting things where they don't belong. His debut acting role with Silo Theatre Company was in Taylor Mac's outrageous black comedy *Hir*. He has done extensive assistant directing with Te Rehia Theatre Company and is a founding member of Dusty Rooms Productions, which focuses on comedies with significant mental health themes. He directed the Pākehā inception of Ionesco's *The Chairs* as part of Te Pou Theatre's diversity season, and Camilla Walker's *Such Stuff As Dreams* as part of Te Pou's Rangatahi series.

He is a founding whānau member of Te Pou Theatre.

### Actor: Tuakoi Ohia

Tuakoi Ohia grew up in Hamilton for most of her life. She has always had a creative streak, but has only recently been introduced to the world of acting. She made her debut this year in a drama series 'Ahikāroa', the first bilingual drama series in Te Reo Māori. She has now made connections as a whānau member in Te Pou Theatre, and was lucky to land in 'Sofia's Garden' as her very first theatre production.

**Actor: Tyler Wilson-Kokiri Ngāti Porou**

Tyler Wilson-Kokiri is from Tikitiki/Rangitukia. Graduating from The New Zealand School of Drama in 2016, he has since played Kiwa Bolton in the rap musical *I Ain't Mad At Cha* as well as performed in three children's theatre shows: "Ruia Te Kakano" produced by Te Rehia Theatre, *Odd One Out* produced by Capital E in association with Barbarian Productions and *The Matariki Glow Show*. Tyler hopes to one day be a professional wrestler as well as one of the most exciting actors in New Zealand. In his down time, Tyler enjoys playing the guitar, learning martial arts and embarrassing his mother.

**Musical Advisor: Leon Radojkovic**

Leon Radojkovic is a composer and multi-instrumentalist based in Auckland, New Zealand. He makes music for theatre, film, dingy bars and for fun. He is the creator and composer of *Live Live Cinema*, which has extensively toured a triplicate of productions since 2011 in NZ, Australia and Europe.

Some of Leon's other theatrical credits include; *Essays in Love*, *Mr Burns*, *Peter and the Wolf*, *Amadeus*, *Boys Will Be Boys*, *Medea*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Brel*, *The Only Child* and *Hui*.

His awards include three Auckland Theatre Awards for excellence and one for best music/sound design. Leon also fronts the avant-garde ensemble Fortress Europe.

**Image design:** Marigold Janezic of Gold Creative Ltd - [marigold@goldcreative.co.nz](mailto:marigold@goldcreative.co.nz)

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Tukiwaho whānau



Thank you for coming to the development season of Sofija's Garden. We plan to offer this as a touring show to schools in 2020. If your school is interested, please email the producer Renee Liang at [docrnz@gmail.com](mailto:docrnz@gmail.com).

We would also love to hear from you if you have any thoughts or comments, for future development of this work.