

The News

Lakes District
& Central Otago

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REVIEW

with
Cris Johnston

Poetry show hits the mark

WANAKA SHOWCASE
Outspoken Festival
Cinema Paradiso
February 11

To be honest, I was feeling a little apprehensive about attending the Wanaka Showcase — one of several shows put on during the four-week Outspoken Festival.

I mean — let's face it — it was probably more than 40 years since I'd been enthralled with the likes of Bob Dylan, Allen Ginsberg, Woody Guthrie and other wandering troubadours of earlier decades.

It was almost a surprise to find a near-capacity audience at venue the Cinema Paradiso — clearly poetry has its following in this town which is usually identified more with outdoor activities than the arts.

The show opened true to its name with readings by Wanaka locals, including pupils from Mount Aspiring College, and therein lay its charm. Most of us in the audience knew at least one person on stage and the performance by members of theatre group Flat Out Productions won plenty of hearts with their tongue-in-cheek critique of "news" items from local papers.

Anyone a little nervous about "poetry recitals" — and there were a few of us — was immediately put at ease.

The Lyttelton Poets (Helen Crystall, Rebecca Nash, Ciaran Fox, Ben Brown and Andy Coyle) took hold of the second half of the evening. Theirs was a mixed performance for this reviewer with Ben Brown the stand-out performance.

While I was intrigued to see 21st-century poetry seemed relatively unchanged from those heady Dylan and Ginsberg days, it was clearly still a window into other people's lives, reflecting their loves, hates and struggles to perfect strangers.

The Outspoken Festival finishes on Tuesday.

Celebration of storytelling near end

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Wanaka's inaugural Outspoken Festival of Words and Storytelling comes to an end on Tuesday with 2012 New Zealand National Poetry Slam champion Ali Jacs and poetry hip hop rapper Tourettes (also known as Dominic Hoey) headlining a performance at Amigos Mexican Restaurant.

Jointly organised by local women Liz Breslin and Julia Le, the festival was launched last month with the aim of showing the Upper Clutha community that poetry and storytelling were anything but dull.

Since opening on January 12, it has featured weekly performances from top New Zealand wordsmiths including Sam Hunt, the South Auckland Poets Collective, Mark

Raffills, John Carr and several local poets, including Ms Breslin who founded the Wanaka group Poetic Justice.

Tuesday's finale would be a "no holds barred" show, Ms Le said.

"Ali Jacs and Tourettes draw on life observations, personal struggles and societal matters to provoke and entertain. Ali will also give a workshop to pupils at Mount Aspiring College, thanks to a grant from the Upper Clutha Arts Council."

Overall the festival had been very successful, she said.

"We have had an incredible response from artists and audiences and there have been many magic moments. It has been really motivating to see that we managed to convert 'theatre goers' to the spoken word."

A second festival was planned for 2015, Ms Le said.



Spokeswomen . . . Outspoken Festival organisers Liz Breslin (left), of Hawea Flat, and Julia Le, of Albert Town, aim to show the Upper Clutha community that poetry and storytelling are anything but dull.
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