Welcome to the second volume of The New Zealand Journal of Research in Performing Arts and Education: Nga Mahi a Rehia. The mission of the journal is to provide a platform for the publication, and therefore for the development, of research within New Zealand in the fields of drama, music, and dance, as they relate to education in its widest sense. The range of the articles in this issue is wide indeed. They vary from specific concerns with school curriculum to a discussion of what might be termed the first New Zealand play.

Yet, what is interesting about all the articles is that, while this issue is not a themed issue, they all refer, in some way, to the wider social aspects of performing arts, to the use to which performing arts are put. As a collective body of work, the articles encourage us to question the role and function of performing arts and the role and function we have as individuals who work in drama, music or dance.

They relate collectively to some degree to the issue that Brecht alerted us to when he said that “Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it.” As we all know, from Brecht’s viewpoint, theatre helped conserve society rather than transform it. Brecht saw the Germany of the 1920’s and 30’s as a conservative, stratified, discriminatory and exploitative society, which exalted the rich and powerful and which served the interests of the capitalist economy.

As a Marxist, he was joining in a debate began by Marx seventy or so years earlier. As a theatre practitioner, though, Brecht was giving a specific focus to Marx’s own, much wider claim that “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”

Marx, at the beginnings of social science, was questioning the role of social science. He was distinguishing it from the natural sciences. Where natural scientists described, categorised and classified a world which existed independently of people, social scientists must work to transform the social world on which people depended.

These observations and dictums from long ago are echoed in our own work in performing arts today, whether academically in critical theory’s contribution to the debate over the Arts, or practically in critical pedagogy’s contribution to schooling. With the expansion of applied theatre projects and the growth of applied theatre companies worldwide we see an increasing commitment to a performing arts which turns outwards to the world rather than internally to the individual subject’s creativity.
Within drama, the post World War II period, following the influence of Peter Slade and Brian Way, saw the advance of drama education as a tool for personal development, as a way of expanding and combining emotion, imagination and creativity in the service of the self. Today, it is much more about understanding the world and our role in shaping it.

All of the articles in the current volume, whether consciously or not, are located within the context of this debate or are influenced by it.

Susan Battye’s article looks at the work of Vanuatu’s Wan Smolbag theatre company, a company which is not only a large social service provider, but presents very challenging and uncompromising political theatre.

Tracey-Lynne Cody’s article investigates the use of personal narrative in a devised, community theatre project that focussed on personal and cultural identities. She looks at the educational, social and, in particular, the personal impact on participants.

Doctoral student, Graham McPhail reports on a small case study of how music teachers respond to oppositional narratives of tradition and progress and of how the culture wars are exemplified in music education. The music school curriculum is a contested terrain and the article is a reminder of the past ideological debates over what is to count as school knowledge and their current manifestation.

Nick Brown discusses his own production of Shakespeare’s The Tempest, a school production which, in its own way, tries to define what a contemporary New Zealand theatre should look like. Both the article and the production deal with the problem of how to resolve the conflicting approaches of the western theatre tradition and the Maori performance tradition and raise the question of what sort of playmaking we should be involved in in schools.

Janinka Greenwood discusses Alan Mulgan’s play, For Love of Appin, which is regarded as the first New Zealand play. What New Zealand theatre should look like, in the long process from colonial dominion to independent state has been one of the central theatrical debates in this country, since we first became aware of not just our cultural cringe but our place in post colonial history.

Delia Baskerville’s article describes and assesses a small project with young people in a residential youth justice facility. Her project researched the potential of drama to model a cooperative learning approach. Small scale though the project was, it clearly belongs to the prison theatre genre which worldwide has asked on whose behalf we make our theatre.
Kata Fulop reports on the very early stages of her doctoral research into how theatre and performance function within Pasifika to maintain and create the identity of immigrants. Her article looks at the identity discourse and applies aspects of it to two New Zealand plays.

Larry O’Farrell ‘s article is a reprint of a paper he gave at a symposium exploring research into singing as a medium through which to foster inter-cultural understanding. His article is not so much concerned with the specifics of singing. Rather he asksÂ more generally the question: “Why should we think that the arts might hold the power to change human perceptions and behaviours?”

The power to change behaviours is at the heart of any mechanism for social change. This current volume of the journal, however, is not a clarion call to action of any sort. It simply offers a number of interesting views of performing arts and performing arts projects which seem to illustrate how central to our conception of the role and function of performing arts an understanding of social reality and social change has become.

**Biography**

Alan Scott

Alan Scott lectures at the College of Education of the University of Canterbury, within the School of Educational Studies and Human Development. A former Head of the National Academy of Singing and Dramatic Art, his research interests centre on the politics and sociology of education, and the politics and sociology of theatre. He has been the theatre critic for the Christchurch Press for 17 years and works with the Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu trust, a Maori theatre company, which creates theatre in prisons and Youth Justice Centres.