

## **BLACK GRACE**

**Neil Ieremia, Artistic Director**

### **biography**

Black Grace is New Zealand's leading contemporary dance company.

Founded by Neil Ieremia (ONZM\*) in 1995, one of New Zealand's most accomplished choreographers, a creative entrepreneur and inspirational leader. Ieremia draws from his Samoan and New Zealand roots to create innovative dance works that reach across social, cultural and generational barriers.

The work itself is highly physical, rich in the story telling traditions of the South Pacific and expressed with raw finesse, unique beauty and power.

Born in Wellington and of Samoan heritage, Ieremia was raised in a tough working-class neighbourhood in a country focused more on sporting prowess and agriculture rather than creative expression. At the age of nineteen and with no formal training, Mr Ieremia resigned from his banking job, left home, enrolled in a full time dance programme and broke his parents' hearts.

As a freelance professional dancer, Ieremia worked with many leading New Zealand choreographers as well as creating a number of commissioned works before founding Black Grace in 1995.

The Company features some of New Zealand's finest dancers and has toured internationally to Europe, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Australia and New Caledonia. In 2004 Black Grace made its USA debut, performing a sold-out season at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, with a subsequent return to the Festival in 2005. Since then, the Company has performed regularly throughout North America earning audience and critical acclaim.

Numerous 'firsts' for a New Zealand choreographer include a four-week season at the New Victory Theater on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in NYC; performances at the renowned Cervantino Festival in Mexico, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the 2010 Cultural Olympiad in Vancouver.

Among his many other achievements, Ieremia has received a 2005 Arts Foundation of New Zealand Laureate Award, and the 2009 Paul D. Fleck Fellowship in the Arts from The Banff Centre, Canada. In 2015, Ieremia received a City of Porirua Anniversary Award and the Senior Pacific Artist Award from Creative New Zealand. In 2016, Ieremia was appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to dance, and was made an Honorary Member of Dance ICONS. In 2021, he was a recipient of a Kea World Class Award, and was inducted into the Porirua Hall of Fame. In 2022, Ieremia and Black Grace received the inaugural Moana Creative Enterprise Award at the 2022 Pacific Business Trust Awards.

\* ONZM: Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit

for more information: <https://tinyurl.com/3bhyknh2>