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Moana draws Pasifika Powerhouse

A 90-year-old film of Samoa connected Pasifika filmmakers, artists, academics and students in debate at Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision Wellington.

The restored film *Moana with Sound* (1926/1980/2014) had its New Zealand premiere at Ngā Taonga last week, followed by a day-long symposium co-hosted with [Victoria University of Wellington's Stout Research Centre](#), and supported by the [Kava Club](#) Arts Collective and CoCA Pasifika of Massey University.





A “powerhouse” of Pasifika filmmakers – Whetu Fala, Tusi Tamasese, Karin Williams, Victor Rodger, Nathaniel Lees, Makerita Urale and Sima Urale. (Image: Mishelle Muagututi’a)

Speakers at the symposium included filmmakers Tusi Tamasese, Sima Urale and Paul Wolfram, writers Victor Rodgers, Miria George and Karlo Mila, as well as Dr Teresia Teaiwa of Victoria University and Te Papa’s Sean Mallon. (Image: Lisa Taouma)

Television producer and documentary maker Lisa Taouma said:

“It was the powerhouse of Pasifika filmmaking, all having a wonderful kōrero on the documentary ‘Moana,’ film, art and life in general.”

Ngā Taonga chief executive Rebecca Elvy said it was an honour to bring the historic film, restored to its full clarity and beauty, back to Pasifika communities and people of New Zealand.

"This is our reason for being as the audiovisual archive for all New Zealanders, and as part of a wider heritage and cultural community. It is testament to the power and significance of archival films such as *Moana* that we can attract such a high-calibre group."

Associate Professor Annabel Cooper, of the University of Otago's Centre for Research on Colonial Culture said the screening was fascinating, the range of speakers excellent and the conversations absorbing:



Moana with Sound (Robert J. Flaherty, Frances H. Flaherty and Monica Flaherty, 1926/1980/2014)

"I was so impressed with the extent to which quite

controversial issues that press on current academic and film practice were put on the table and debated with a real sense of inquiry."



Badges created and donated as gifts for the speakers, by Wellington designer Tony De Goldi, referencing images from *Moana* and Pacific iconography.

Victoria University's Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Pasifika) Associate Professor Hon. Luamanuvao Winnie Laban, whose maternal grandmother was born in the village, opened the NZ premiere screening and the symposium.

Moana was filmed by the husband and wife team Robert and Frances Flaherty over 1923 and 1924 in the Samoan village Savai'i, and is the first feature-length film to be noted as having "documentary value." In 1975 Monica Flaherty returned to Savai'i to create a soundtrack for her parents' silent film. Sami Van Ingen and Bruce Posner digitally restored the sound version of the film in 2014. At the film's centre is Moana, son of a tribal chief, who journeys towards manhood as he

spends a week being tattooed. The film captures the villagers as they fish, hunt, make clothes, feast and dance.

In May this year, a private screening was held in Wellington for descendants of the Safune district where *Moana* was shot.

"As part of Ngā Taonga's kaupapa, before the public screening, we wanted to return the film to those whose ancestors' lives and images were recorded in *Moana*," said Rebecca Elvy.

She said Ngā Taonga hoped to organise further screenings of *Moana* for the Pacific Island communities of Auckland.





Moana with Sound (Robert J. Flaherty, Frances H. Flaherty and Monica Flaherty, 1926/1980/2014)

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