

Tama Waipara Biography

Tama Waipara is “a singer’s singer,” a term that has been applied to several ground breaking and established artists in the past. Though he is a relative newcomer, 26-year old New Zealand native Tama Waipara is indeed worthy of the name.

A graduate of the prestigious **Manhattan School of Music** with a Master’s degree in music performance, Tama Waipara is a multi-talented singer/songwriter who plays several instruments, including clarinet and guitar. He is also actively involved in theater and was recently featured in an independent documentary for New Zealand’s **TV One** called **Manhattan Maori (Kiwa Productions**, filmed by **Rhonda Kite** and **Libby Hakaraia**). The inspirational documentary followed five young native New Zealand Maoris (the indigenous people of New Zealand) who relocated to New York City from their small towns to pursue unusual careers.

“It isn’t surprising to me that music would become my life’s passion,” says the charismatic performer. “Music is an amazingly influential and vibrant element in my cultural background. The Maori are a naturalistic and genealogically-based indigenous culture steeped in the traditions of our ancestors, or ‘iwi.’ Our culture is based on an ancestral oral tradition rich in chanted song and percussive, rhythmic music. I was always surrounded by music in my home as a child, both traditional and more westernized, like pop, R&B and jazz. I studied the clarinet formally, but I always felt an urgency to sing.”

As a result of Tama’s exceptional talent and unique and diverse cultural perspectives on music, the singer/songwriter was approached by the New York and Munich-based **ObliqSound** label (a new genre-defying independent recording and production company) to begin work on a solo album.

His forthcoming debut, entitled **Triumph of Time** (scheduled for release Fall 2003), is a fluid and eclectic foray into R&B, jazz, classical, Latin rhythms and an amalgam of exotic indigenous music from around the globe. Tama’s compositions contain an almost instinctual rhythm that combines organic and electronic instrumentation, with his vivid lyrics that seem to evoke a vision that is sublime and enchanted – where thoughts become poetry, poetry becomes verse and verse becomes song.

“From light to dark, from fire to spark, from tree to seed, from flower to weed, from strong to weak, from joy to grief, from best to worst...from lover to lover to lover to lover...” echoes Tama on the sensuous, self-penned opus “Colours of You.” Songs like the title track, “Korowai,” based upon a Maori celebratory hymn about the rite of passage into the underworld – a view of death as the next natural phase of life, is sumptuous. Along the same lines, the romantic, neo-jazz-inflected first single “Felise” features the special touch of Atlanta-based wunderkind, producer and remixer **Chris Brann** (under the **Ananda Project** moniker) and UK based **Freaks**. Indeed, the entire album reverberates with a candor, intensity and stirring spirituality well beyond Tama’s 26 years.

Tama’s vocals are tenuous, dusky, supple, languid and bittersweet possessing a distinctive intonation and “phraseology” inspired by a wealth of legendary song stylists and balladeers like **George Benson**, **Bill Withers**, **Jimmy Scott**, **Donny Hathaway**,

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Stevie Wonder, Kate Bush and Nina Simone –creating a diverse musical blueprint without borders.

“My songs are a hybrid of many elements...contemporary and traditional” reveals Tama. “It’s really important for me to have a full understanding of where I come from musically and culturally because I’m giving a voice to a culture that has been largely silent in the Western world. I’m very blessed. I actually feel like I’m following in a long tradition of Maori musicians from home. People like **Mahinarangi Tocker** – true artists who still possess the human touch.”

Tama Waipara’s debut Triumph of Time (OS 101) to be released Fall 2003 on ObliqSound.

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