

Film buff takes on new role at Gaiety

GAIETY Theatre's new operations officer brings a lifetime of movie knowledge to Wairoa.

Natasha Loh is a born and bred Aucklander who applied for a Wairoa District Council customer services position. During the interview, it became apparent Natasha's skills were very much in the entertainment and movie arena, and her new job covers both customer services and Gaiety operations officer.

Natasha has a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology minoring in Maori Studies and a diploma in business computing.

Her true passion though is movies, having grown up around her dad's Chinese video shop.

She was so keen to get into the industry she sent her CV to 75 video outlets in Auckland and landed a part-time job at one. From there, she worked her way into a management position.

Natasha managed two video shops and was product manager of the film division of a DVD game and distribution company.

The next step was buying Video Ezy Grey Lynn, and she also established a pop culture shop centred around movies and gaming merchandise.

"My store wasn't just about blockbuster movies. I also specialised in classics, TV series and documentaries, so I really did have something to suit everyone's tastes."

The Auckland Armageddon Expo, described as New Zealand's largest geek, gaming and entertainment event, was a

big part of her industry and she had been attending since 2006.

Natasha was also on the Auckland Film Society committee from 2006 to 2016, and was a monitor for the Auckland International Film Festival for several years.

The shift in video culture saw her shut up shop last year after nearly 10 years in business. However, a plus for Wairoa is the die-hard movie fan still has about 30,000 DVDs and film and gaming merchandise, and hopes to start a Wairoa film club where the audience won't be short of movies to choose from.

While Natasha is only a few weeks into her shift to Wairoa, she is loving how friendly everyone is, and is not missing the one-and-a-half-hour commute to work.

'The Gaiety Theatre is a wonderful space. I love movies but the theatre is more than just a cinema'

"The Gaiety Theatre is a wonderful space. I love movies, but the theatre is more than just a cinema, and I would like to see it being used for more community-based and different events."

Natasha says it is early days, but she is hoping to make Wairoa

her new home and is now on the scout for a job for her Auckland-based partner, who is a government agency business manager, so he can make the move too.

Wairoa District Council chief executive Steven May said it was great to have someone of Natasha's calibre on board at the Gaiety.

"She brings a lot of experience and knowledge, and we look forward to her working with the community."



Gaiety Theatre's new operations officer Natasha Loh brings a wealth of film knowledge to the role.



Beatbox artist Hope Haami with year 10-13 music students after Friday's beatbox workshop at Wairoa College.

Sharing beats, korero

FEMALE beatboxing sensation Hope Haami aka Hope One shared beats and korero with Wairoa College and Nuhaka School students last Friday.

The visit was part of Ms Haami's School of Beatbox Tour 2019, a beatbox workshop to mentor students, sharing her knowledge, experience and skills.

School of Beatbox began in 2013 and Ms Haami said the workshops had been well received by students.

"It's cool to see the kids come to life, and I think I've created some mini-beatboxers along the way."

Haami was 13 when she first discovered beatboxing.

"A really popular beatboxer called Rahzel put an album out and everyone was into it. But there was a thought at the time that girls couldn't beatbox, so I decided to teach myself."

"I started practising at home and jamming with other people. Then my brother suggested I audition for Australian Idol, who were looking for beatboxers for a beatbox crew, and that started my stage performing."

Ms Haami spoke to the students about her chronic shyness when she first started.

"During my Australian Idol audition, it was at a shopping mall. I spent my entire performance looking down at the floor and when I looked up everyone was cheering. They picked eight people and I was the only girl."

"Then we went on a national tour, 80 shows. I was so shy and I was still looking at the floor for the first 10 shows and then I started to look at people, and engage with people — and I started to love it."

"From there, I started touring, meeting and collaborating with other musicians. Then I started teaching."

Ms Haami is also part of award-winning theatre group Hot Brown Honey, a unique hip hop cabaret stage performance.

"We're a first nations women's intersectional feminism show, and we represent different cultures growing up in Australia — Maori, Tongan, Samoan. We talk about issues of social justice, sexism, racism and address stereotypes."

"We've been travelling the world for the past five years. We've just finished a North American tour, and we've performed throughout the UK and Scandinavia."

Haami is working on a solo production called Herstory.

"It's a semi-autobiographical story about discovering your identity. It's a half-music, half-theatre show. I have a guitarist working with me. I'm not really a recording artist, I'm more of a stage performer."

"What inspired me to create School of Beatbox and visit schools was that when I was younger, when I started beatboxing, I didn't see very many of me reflected back to me."

"I remember seeing Ladi6. Back then she was beatboxing on stage with her crew Sheelahroc and I was so inspired. I could see myself on stage — it gave me hope that it's OK to follow this path of beatboxing."

"No girls were doing beatboxing at that time either and to see a female on stage doing it . . . that's the feeling I want to give back to the kids on these school tours, to let them know if you focus on something and you're determined, you will get there. Music can take you around the world."

■ Beatboxing is a form of vocal percussion where the artist mimicks drum machines and turntables using their mouth, lips, tongue and voice.

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