

# MEDIA RELEASE

THE  
**COURT**  
THEATRE

For immediate release

## **Be Like Billy?**

Written by Rutene Spooner

Directed by Holly Chappell

Musical Direction by Henare Kaa

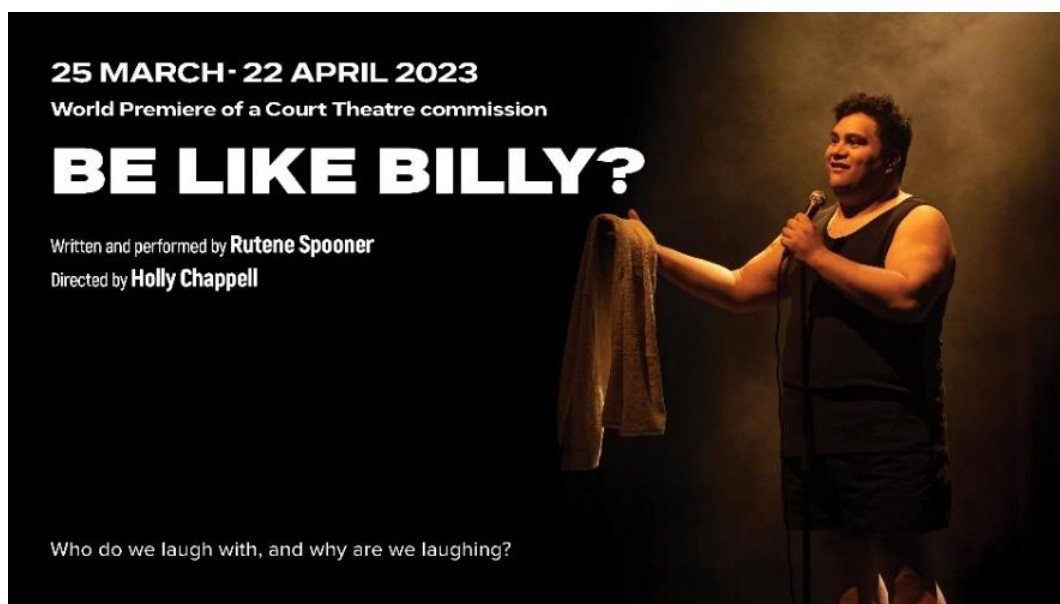
Sponsor: Naturally Tiles

Location: The Court Theatre, Addington, Christchurch

Dates: 25 March – 22 April 2023

## **Be Like Billy** Summons the Cheek and Humour of an Aotearoa Comedy Legend to The Court Theatre Stage

“E ara, e oho, matike, maranga!”



### IN BRIEF:

In the world premiere of his new work, *Be Like Billy?*, award-winning Māori actor and cabaret performer Rutene Spooner (Ngati Porou, Ngāruahine, Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki) shares his personal journey of following in the footsteps of “te master, te legend, te funny fala”, Billy T James.

Featuring the hottest showband in Ōtautahi - four-piece band Tequila Muttonbirds - bilingual performer, staunch Te Reo Māori advocate and mischief maker Spooner arms himself with all the

Season Sponsor



Core Funder



The Court Theatre

PO Box 268

Christchurch 8140

New Zealand

Email: [boxoffice@courttheatre.org.nz](mailto:boxoffice@courttheatre.org.nz)

[www.courttheatre.org.nz](http://www.courttheatre.org.nz)

# MEDIA RELEASE

THE  
**COURT**  
THEATRE

usual storytelling devices we would come to expect in a musical inspired by Billy T. After all, “what better way to evoke reflection on our national identity than with a song and a laugh” he says.

*Be Like Billy?* runs 25 March – 22 April and can be seen in double bill with *Rēwena* (discounts apply). Tickets available from [courttheatre.org.nz](http://courttheatre.org.nz)

“‘The Showband Era’ gave birth to some of Māoridom’s greatest entertainers. This play celebrates that whakapapa, tracing all the way back to the cheeky cackle we all know and love. So, what does Māori showmanship look like today?” – Rutene Spooner, Creator and Performer.

## IN DEPTH:

Award-winning Māori actor and cabaret performer Rutene Spooner (Ngati Porou, Ngāruahine, Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki) premieres his latest work, *Be Like Billy?*, to Court Theatre audiences this month. Backed by the hottest showband in Ōtautahi - four-piece band Tequila Muttonbirds - Spooner shares his personal journey of following in the footsteps of “te master, te legend, te funny fala”, Billy T James.

Bilingual performer, staunch Te Reo Māori advocate and mischief maker Spooner arms himself with all the usual storytelling devices we would come to expect in a musical inspired by Billy T. After all, “what better way to evoke reflection on our national identity than with a song and a laugh” he says.

Although Billy’s name is in the title, *Be Like Billy?* - directed by friend and fellow theatre maker Holly Chappell - in fact pays homage to the genealogy of Māori showmanship and many of the Māori musical icons and showbands of the 1980s, and earlier. These entertainers broke through barriers to connect cultures. As Spooner says, “I stand on the shoulders of many haka-boogie-entertainers who did the hard yards so that I didn’t have to.” These great Māori showmen and women also shaped how we saw ourselves as New Zealanders. So, what has changed? And more importantly, what still needs to change?

Spooner himself is well-known to musical-theatre audiences throughout Aotearoa and Australia. He memorably appeared in *Cabaret* and *Little Shop of Horrors* at The Court Theatre and has also written two award winning ‘plays with song’ - *Super Hugh-man* (2017) and *Thoroughly Modern Māui* (2022).

Although Spooner grew up after Billy’s death in 1991, his influence was still pervasive. Billy T James helped open the door to mainstream audiences for other Māori performers and, in doing so, opened minds as well.

For Chappell, who has worked with Spooner over many years, producing four children’s shows for The Court together, becoming involved “felt natural” after having read all of the evolving iterations of the script.

Season Sponsor



Core Funder



The Court Theatre

PO Box 268

Christchurch 8140

New Zealand

Email: [boxoffice@courttheatre.org.nz](mailto:boxoffice@courttheatre.org.nz)

[www.courttheatre.org.nz](http://www.courttheatre.org.nz)

# MEDIA RELEASE

THE  
**COURT**  
THEATRE

“Everyone is on such a different journey with this content” says Chappell. “And that starts from laughter” adds Spooner. There will be plenty on stage in *Be Like Billy?*

Spooner’s play evolved from a casual conversation about Billy T James’s place as tipuna in the realm of performing arts and the man who helped him discover his calling. “I saw Billy perform and when I did, everything just landed. That’s what I wanna do” he says. The Court Theatre commissioned the play in 2016 but at the time Spooner felt he needed to hone his skills more in order to do the story justice. “Now feels like the right time for me as a maker - and now’s the right time for the conversation” he says.

That conversation asks us “Who are we laughing at? And why are we laughing?” As a young man who once aspired to ‘Be like Billy’, Spooner now asks “*Should I be like Billy? What does that even mean today?*” He hopes this show will “jestfully stir that conversation, and some self-reflection. I just want people to be enthusiastically excited about change.”

*Be Like Billy?* is one of six plays from Aotearoa in The Court’s 2023 line-up and the second show especially commissioned by The Court (the first being *Sense and Sensibility*).

*Be Like Billy?* runs 25 March – 22 April, preceded each evening by *Rēwena*. These plays can be seen separately (discounts apply), or people can attend as a double bill. Tickets available from [courttheatre.org.nz](http://courttheatre.org.nz)

“*The Showband Era’ gave birth to some of Māoridom’s greatest entertainers. This play celebrates that whakapapa, tracing all the way back to the cheeky cackle we all know and love. So, what does Māori showmanship look like today?*” – Rutene Spooner, Creator and Performer.

## Cast

[Rutene Spooner](#) Performer / Creator

## Band

[Clayton Hiku](#) Bass  
[Jack Bubb](#) Keys / Synth  
[Henare Kaa](#) Drums / percussion  
[Heather Webb](#) Guitar

## Creatives

[Holly Chappell](#) Director  
[Henare Kaa](#) Musical Direction  
[Juanita Hepi](#) Māori Advisory Kaiāwhina  
[Matt McCutcheon](#) Set Design

Season Sponsor



Core Funder



The Court Theatre

PO Box 268

Christchurch 8140

New Zealand

Email: [boxoffice@courttheatre.org.nz](mailto:boxoffice@courttheatre.org.nz)

[www.courttheatre.org.nz](http://www.courttheatre.org.nz)

# MEDIA RELEASE

THE  
**COURT**  
THEATRE

[Nephtalim Antoine](#)

[Matt Eller](#)

[Giles Tanner](#)

Rochelle Wright

[Scott Leighton](#)

Costume Design

Sound Designer

Lighting Designer / Operator

Properties Manager

Stage Manager

## Ticket Prices

Adult	\$37 - 42
Senior (65+)	\$35 - 39
Group (6+)	10% Discount*
Concessions (see website for details)	\$25

\* Applies to Standard Adult, Friends, Child and Senior price tickets

## Show Times

- Monday - Saturday 8:00pm
- Forum (incl. Cast and Crew Q&A) 3 April
- Matinee 15 April 2:00pm

**Bookings:** phone 0800 333 100 or visit [www.courttheatre.org.nz](http://www.courttheatre.org.nz)

**Images can be found at The Court Theatre's [Media Centre](#)**

## For more information or to arrange an interview please contact:

Julie McCloy, Communications Director

The Court Theatre, 027 305 7305

[Julie.mccloy@courttheatre.org.nz](mailto:Julie.mccloy@courttheatre.org.nz)

Season Sponsor



Core Funder



**The Court Theatre**

PO Box 268

Christchurch 8140

New Zealand

Email: [boxoffice@courttheatre.org.nz](mailto:boxoffice@courttheatre.org.nz)

[www.courttheatre.org.nz](http://www.courttheatre.org.nz)