



World's biggest Polynesian and Maori festival takes over Manukau



By Online Editor
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The world's biggest Polynesian and Maori festival kicked off in South Auckland today.

A cloudless sky and warm sunshine welcomed the early crowds to the 37th annual Polyfest in Otara. More than 100,000 people are expected to pack the Manukau Sports Bowl over the next three days.

During the festival onlookers will witness close to 9500 kids from 58 schools performing traditional Maori and Polynesian dances.

Students train intensely, committing many hours of their own time to getting their routines just right.

Fifteen-year-old Te Raima Huia-Rose Coleman from Papakura High School practised so much she lost her voice.

"I had no voice when I came but I tried my best and I obviously have no voice now," she says hoarsely.

Her school, the first to take to the Maori stage, had no tutor to lead them until two weeks ago when a past student took the reins.

So Papakura have been practising every day during and after school, sometimes for up to four hours at a time.

Many schools practise for months before the event, even coming back early from holidays, so catching up was going to be difficult for Papakura High.

Still, the performance left one of the leaders of the group, Darren Dennis-Paratene, more than satisfied.

The 16-year-old admits to being nervous before going on stage but he didn't let the occasion get to him and channelled it into his performance.

“It's like a feeling like you just want to let everything out in the expression of your actions.”

Opening a show is always difficult but their performance got the crowd going and even provoked a haka from the audience in response.

The pair said they're proud to represent the mana of their school and will be back next year with a bit more practice time.

Although not part of the competitive judging, a diversity stage with more worldly performances has been added in recent years to reflect the multicultural aspect of the event.

There people will discover groups from Canadian to Indian and anything in between.

SOURCE: FAIRFAX NZ/PACNEWS