

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2017 – Modern Maori Quartet: That's Us! ****

Magical Songs of Love and Longing

**** Assembly George Square Studios

In the 1950s and '60s Maori show bands rode a wave of popularity in New Zealand and soon Australia, taking the cabaret and nightclubs world by storm.

The Modern Maori Quartet revives the slick slick suits and smooth style of that era but with an updated song list that includes several compositions of their own. One tune that stays with anyone in the audience is [Don't Fall in Love](#).

The music is nostalgic and evocative, songs of love and longing, melding lilting, familiar tunes and Maori melodies, with a lesson in some basic Maori expressions woven in. The four performers are both professionally accomplished and slyly flirtatious, playing off each other in back chats and musical duels.

The Assembly theatre auditorium is a very different space from the Quartet's recent tour with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, playing the biggest concert halls in the country. But by the end of the hour they've cast a Kiwi spell over the room, which it's hard to leave behind.



The Modern Maori Quartet

There's a war medley, in a reminder of the Maori soldiers who served in both First and Second World Wars including at Gallipoli, where the huge casualty rolls are seen as having a

profound impact on the emerging identities of both New Zealand and Australia.

Two of the performers, Rutene Spooner and Tainui Kuru, are drama school graduates with extensive backgrounds in musical theatre, with gifted voices and acting skills that shine through. Matariki Whatarau is a veteran of stage and screen performances; the four call themselves actors who sing, rather than singers who act. James Tito is the founder of the group, intent on reviving and modernising the glories of an earlier era.