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Encouraging all to create



Coming-of-age story by Deaf filmmaker

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By Teresa Heinz Housel

Growing up in Wellington, filmmaker Jared Flitcroft often felt isolated as a Deaf child in a hearing family.

Jared, now 31 and living in Christchurch, says that "most Deaf people experience a sense of isolation and ongoing barriers in communicating with hearing families and friends, and trying to access things".

In 2011, Jared began writing *Tama*, which he describes as a "coming-of-age" film about a Deaf Māori boy from Kaikohe who wants to learn the haka. Although the 15-minute film is not autobiographical, he says its overall theme of isolation reflects his experiences.

"Tama grows up isolated, bullied and unable to communicate with his own family," Jared says. "He becomes good friends with an older man because he wants to learn the haka. And so he develops from a weak boy and becomes a proud young man."

A milestone in film collaboration

Tama is New Zealand's first co-directorship between a Deaf and hearing director. The film's co-director is Jack O'Donnell, who is hearing.



Jack, 24, is a Wellington freelance videographer. He first met Jared when they both acted in the Odd Socks production of "Words Apart" in 2009.

"It was a great collaboration," says Jack, who has worked with Odd Socks Productions (<http://oddssocks.co.nz/>) and the Deaf community since 2008.

Still in pre-production as they tighten the script, the film's languages include Maori Sign Language, New Zealand Sign Language, spoken Maori and English – all used by its four characters: Tama, Hone (the father), Te Ahorangi (the old man) and Rongo (the bully).

Jared has been in Christchurch since March 2013 where he's renovating houses and businesses. However, he Skypes regularly with the *Tama* team.

Shooting is scheduled for later this year. Jared says that most shooting days will involve between 30 to 50 people in the cast and crew, depending on the scenes.

Creating *Tama* is a true collaborative process, Jared says. "Jack and I have a 50/50 partnership in the making of this film. He will focus on the sound and I will focus on the visuals. How things look on screen will match with the sound. We're learning how we'll communicate to lead our cast and crew."

Captivated by filmmaking

Jared first considered filmmaking when he was 16 and was captivated by the special effects in Peter Jackson's *Braindead* (1992), a zombie horror comedy. He became more and more intrigued by other aspects of film

production such as storytelling, directing and acting.



After completing his BA in Communication and Media Studies from Victoria University, Jared attended the New Zealand Film and Television School and became its first Deaf graduate in 2012.

He completed most of his film papers without NZSL interpreters because none were available. He had to pay for interpreters out of his own pocket when they were necessary.

“The experience was a real challenge for me, incredibly difficult. One full year without interpreters made it difficult to communicate with my classmates and learn new things,” he says. “I’d already worked with a few of my lecturers so I knew a little about their style and what they were teaching, so in a way I was quite lucky.”

Among Jared’s film school activities, he directed shorts such as *Ripped Apart*, *Sic* and *Evacuo*, which were all finalists in the New Zealand Deaf Short Film Festival.

Financing the film

Jared’s previous filmmaking experiences have been valuable preparation for the process of moving *Tama* towards production. The *Tama* team has raised \$23,000 towards the \$35,000 target budget from grants, campaigns and funds. The Arts Foundation added *Tama* to Boosted, its crowdfunding platform, in April 2012. The \$10,000 generated from Boosted will help finance the film’s production phase as well as crew, transport, gear and NZSL interpreters.

In addition to Boosted, Jared received the 2012 AMP Do Your Thing! Wellington Scholarship. He used the award to location scout in Kaikohe, rewrite the script and create a website and Facebook page about the film project.

Digital media’s accessibility

Jared is profiled in the second edition of *Arts For All: increasing access to the arts for disabled people*, where he talks about the importance of digital media as a valuable communications tool.

"The digital world evolves all the time and now Deaf people are a part of it," he says in the profile. "Deaf people, in my opinion, are being treated better these days when it comes to the arts, especially with the use of interpreters, the provision of captions and transcripts online."

Citing favourite films such as *American Beauty* and Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*, Jared would like to make feature films and establish a motion picture division of Odd Socks Productions.

Most films are aimed at hearing audiences and Deaf people are often left behind in following the story. "I want to ensure there is equality in forms. As a filmmaker, I want to ensure people from both Deaf and hearing worlds can enjoy the movie at the same time."

Most of all, Jared hopes that watching *Tama* will help hearing people better understand Deaf people's experiences. "I hope the audience will learn what can happen in this world, that some Deaf people can be isolated, dealing with bullying and having issues with communication barriers."



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