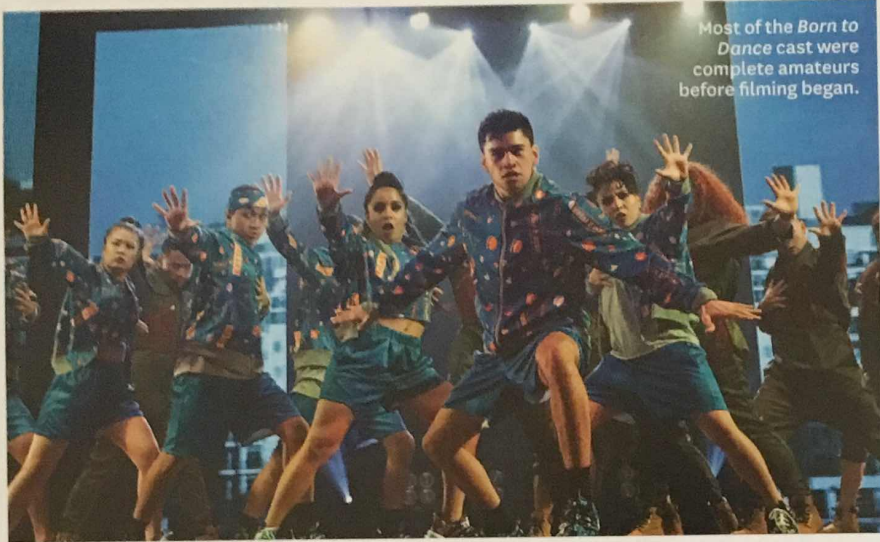




Kiwi *Born to Dance* Steps Up

A hip-hop drama set in New Zealand and featuring a largely Maori and Polynesian cast has become the most unlikely of box-office hits *Down Under* By Pip Bulbeck



Most of the *Born to Dance* cast were complete amateurs before filming began.

Born to Dance, from Kiwi actor-director **Tammy Davis**, brought in more than 1 million New Zealand dollars (\$650,000) in theaters last year, making it one of only 19 locally made films to reach that milestone. Not bad for the first Kiwi dance movie.

The film, which will have its international debut Feb. 13 in the Generation 14plus sidebar in Berlin, was inspired by **Parris Goebel**, the 24-year-old New Zealand hip-hop dancer and choreographer whose Royal Family dance crew is a global phenomenon. Multiple winners of the hip-hop world championships, the Royal Family was featured in *Step Up All In*, which earned more than \$86 million worldwide as the last film in the *Step Up* franchise. Goebel, who played Violet in the

film, has worked with **Jennifer Lopez** and **Janet Jackson** and recently choreographed and shot the already iconic video for **Justin Bieber's** recent hit, *Sorry*.

Goebel also served as choreographer on *Born to Dance*, ensuring the movie's moves are as cutting edge as she is. Set in the high-energy contemporary dance world, the film is essentially a classic coming-of-age story: We follow Tu (dancer and first-time actor **Tia-Taharoa Maipi**), a young man caught between his hopes and dreams and the expectations of family. His father wants Tu to enlist in the army; Tu wants to be the hip-hop champion of New Zealand.

The *Glee*-style story of the outsider, or "the kid struggling to fulfill his dream," is one the

director knows well. "I've been there, I'm still there," says Davis. It's no accident that the *Born to Dance* cast is highly diverse, including many newcomers from New Zealand's Maori and Polynesian minorities.

Stan Walker, one of the film's stars and, like Davis, of Maori decent, says he's proud to see his people "being examples of hope ... All of the actors in the film are paving the way for the next generation, and they don't even know it."

Davis worked hard with the cast, 90 percent of whom had no acting experience. The director put in the hours in rehearsals, and with specialist dance unit director **Craig Graham**, to bring out the performances on screen.

"We wanted to make sure that every dance sequence meant something to the kids," says Graham. "We needed to find the emotion inside the dance and ensure that what you are getting in the dance is true to the story."

But the real star, Davis says, was Goebel, who worked not only on the film's choreography but also contributed to how the dance sequences were shot. "She's amazing," Davis says. "Her creative integrity came through ... Working with someone of her expertise made me raise my game." **TV-14**



Goebel