

## Local hero ‘the Porirua tip lady’ celebrated in CompassionFest 2023

The life of Kae Miller, the woman who built the peace lodge on the point between Lyall and Houghton Bays and helped inspire Tapu Te Ranga Marae’s construction, is being celebrated on October 27-29 as part of this year’s CompassionFest.

The festival, based in Island Bay and its environs, will also feature music generated from mushrooms, food-based events at the lodge, and a jazz concert.

Launched in 2018, CompassionFest is a two-yearly festival celebrating local ‘heroes of compassion’. Motivated by a desire to counter growing polarisation, CompassionFest fosters fun events where people can share stories of individuals who transformed our city with a vision of hope for the future.

Previous CompassionFests have celebrated well-known local heroes like Mother Suzanne Aubert. In 2023, it commemorates the story of Kae Miller (1910-1994), a pioneering mental health and environmental activist, and grandmother of noted Wellington writer and *Post* columnist Max Rashbrooke, who will chair a symposium on her life and works.

Miller had a life-long concern for the well-being of those who suffered from mental illness. In her youth she also spent time in 1930s Nazi Germany, where she helped smuggle out members of the Jewish community – an experience that birthed in her a deep concern for the plight of refugees.

Miller later became deeply involved in the environmental movement. She promoted foraging, protested against the logging of native forests, and set up one of New Zealand’s first recycling centres by living on the grounds of the Porirua tip. This led to her nickname, ‘the Porirua tip lady’, as well as prompting a 1980s cover story in the *Listener*, and – according to Tapu Te Ranga Marae founder Bruce Stewart – helping inspire him to build the marae from recycled materials.

By the 1980s, Miller had moved to Houghton Valley, above Princess Bay. Despite now being in her 70s, she launched the movement to replant the South Coast with native bush, a legacy we enjoy today.

On Friday October 27, CompassionFest 2023 kicks off with a musical evening headlined by Island Bay’s own Kieran Monaghan and his “interspecies trio” vegetable.machine.animal.

In this innovative collaboration, featuring a fungus, a modular synth and a drummer, Monaghan translates the impulses given off by fungi into music. This gives nature itself a voice in this year’s festival line-up, a tribute to Miller’s respect for the natural world and her lifelong practice of foraging for mushrooms. (7.30-9:30pm, Island Bay Bowling Club, entry by koha donation.)

On Saturday 28, Compassionfest’s events will take place in the Island Bay Presbyterian Centre (88 The Parade). It will feature presentations on customary dyeing techniques using native plants and the uses of foraged seaweed in the kitchen and garden; interactive activities; and a 7:30pm jazz concert paying tribute to the persecuted composers of Kae Miller’s Europe.

10am til 3pm Sunday 29 will be a time for relaxing, enjoying nature, and sharing food and stories at the lodge Miller built above Princess Bay (park by the beach, find a track heading up the hill, and walk north to find the lodge). The festival will close with a panel discussion on Miller’s activism and how it might guide us in future. Panellists include Gabriel Tupou (Hutt City Councillor), Jo White (Home of Compassion) and Rev. Dr Bruce Hamill. (Island Bay Home of Compassion chapel, 7.30-9.30pm.)

For more information on all festival events, search for CompassionFest Island Bay on Facebook.

Or check out our website which includes articles and an overview of Miller's life

<https://compassionfest.org.nz/home>.

For more information on vegetable.machine.animal visit <https://skirtedrecords.com/vegetable-machine-animal/press-release-v-m-a/>.

For interviews, please contact Nathan Parry on [minister@IBPC.org.nz](mailto:minister@IBPC.org.nz).