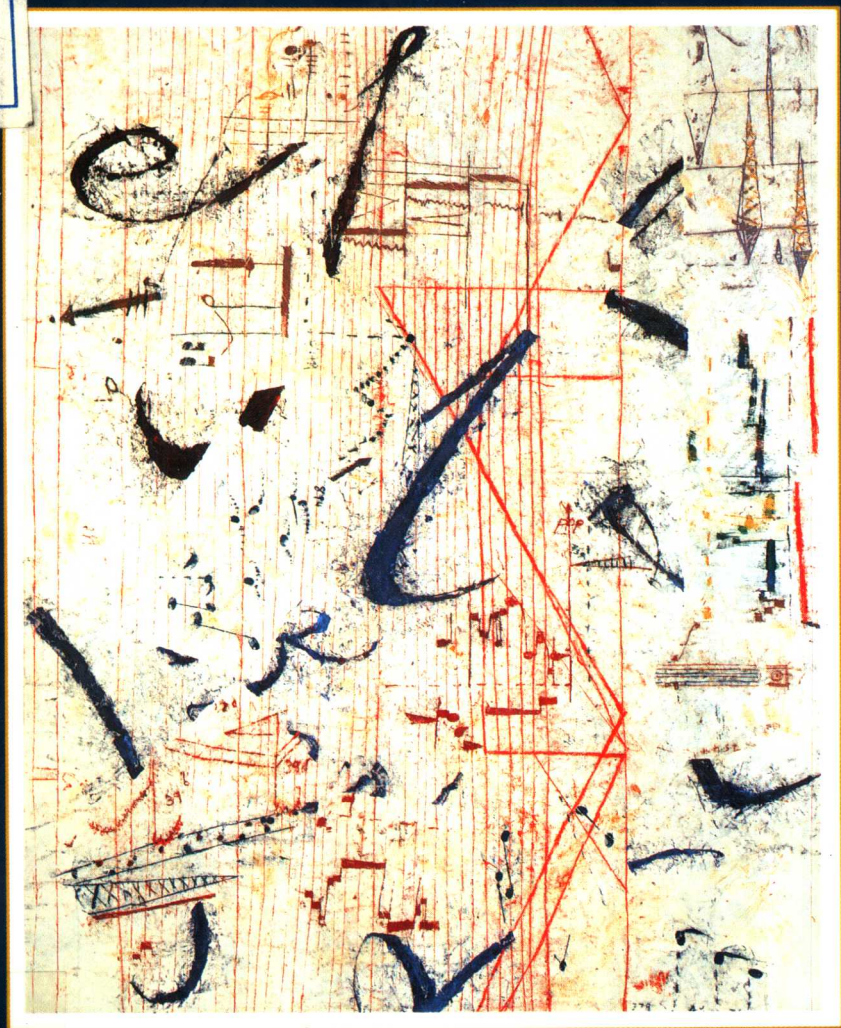


THE OXFORD HISTORY OF  
NEW ZEALAND

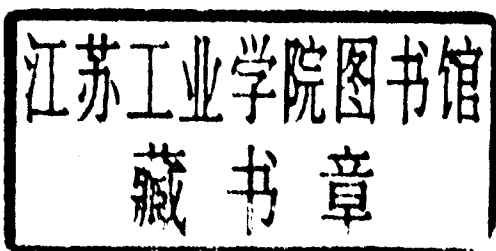
# MUSIC



John Mansfield Thomson

# *The Oxford History of New Zealand Music*

John Mansfield Thomson



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# Introduction

Like America, Canada, and Australia, New Zealand's European musical culture had British origins. By the 1890s a vigorous choral, orchestral, brass band, and domestic musical life had taken root, enlivened by visiting opera companies, singers, and instrumentalists. From this ambience there emerged the first professional composer, Alfred Hill (1870-1960), whose experiences in the Gewandhaus Orchestra and at the Leipzig Conservatorium were not always appreciated in a colonial environment. Hill began explorations of Māori music, his cantata *Hinemoa* (1896) and subsequent ballads drawing world-wide attention to the musical gifts of New Zealand's indigenous people, although touring Māori concert parties and singers had, on a smaller scale, already revealed their music's power.

The Māori showed similar curiosity about European music and soon tackled sailors' shanties as well as hymns, folk-songs and operatic arias, a process which has continued to the present day. Māori vocal skills won the accolades of musically sophisticated Europeans such as Sarah Harriet Selwyn, wife of the first Anglican Bishop, and Lady Martin, wife of the first Attorney-General. That incomparable tradition of Māori singers, which began in the nineteenth century with Princess Te Rangi Pai and Princess Iwa, has continued in the careers of artists such as Inia Te Wiata and Kiri Te Kanawa.

The musical relationship between the two cultures is an important theme in any historical account and it is set forth here quite extensively. It plays a part in answering the question so often asked, 'Is there a New Zealand music?', to which there are many answers. For there exists a strong performing tradition which began in the later nineteenth century when the first New Zealand musicians set forth. Subsequently, their numbers have gathered strength, until today there are many New Zealand-born artists who have won international recognition. This aspect of musical life, particularly important to a young country, extends to choral groups such as the National Youth Choir, to brass bands, and to contemporary music ensembles, each of which has achieved outstanding success abroad. If it still requires dedication, hard work, and ingenuity to pursue the career of a professional musician within New Zealand, this is related to the small population of the country, just over three million people, and the relatively modest, not to say meagre amount the state is prepared to pledge to the arts, not to any reluctance on the part of audiences to sustain them.

Those who ask 'Is there a New Zealand music?' mean, of course, 'Are there any New Zealand composers?', a question often put to the author. The second part of this book tries to provide a convincing answer. For following Hill—whose active life centred on Australia from 1915 onwards—there emerged in

the late 1930s the composer Douglas Lilburn (b. 1915), at a time when a group of poets and writers were also articulating their responses to New Zealand society and life. Lilburn's career as composer, teacher, and advocate of New Zealand music is central and crucial to the tradition. His works, encompassing so many fields, are at the heart of the New Zealand repertoire. The following generations have benefited from his tilling of the soil. They have endeavoured in their own ways to develop further a musical language with a distinctive New Zealand style, aims Lilburn himself delineated in his two seminal talks 'A search for tradition' (1946) and 'A search for a language' (1969). The New Zealand composer today can be found in the electro-acoustic studios of Europe, the concert halls of Edinburgh, London, or Sydney as readily as in his or her own land. In this international world of contemporary music, which often obliterates personal styles, he nevertheless retains something of his origins. When the *New Zealand Times* wrote of the young Alfred Hill in 1892 as being 'indeed among the first of what we believe will be a long line of musicians destined to rise in this colony', it may have been merely another example of the euphoria common at the time, a vein which had reached its apotheosis in J. A. Froude's *Oceana* of 1886. But in fact history has given substance to this prophesy. Perhaps it is time to risk another.

This book was commissioned by the Composers Foundation and the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council. In practical terms it soon became apparent that the material was far more extensive than had been imagined. It might seem that 150 years of music-making in a remote part of the world would fit easily into some 300 pages, the limit set by the publisher. The fact that this was not feasible is testimony to the vitality of the inheritance and to the renewed impetus music found in a new environment. Therefore, a number of topics have had to be passed over, and considerable condensation has been made of others in the interest of making this as much an overview as possible.

Subjects that I have already written about elsewhere have, therefore, been dealt with more briefly. *Into a New Key* covers the origins and history of the Music Federation of New Zealand from 1950-1982 (Music Federation of New Zealand, 1985), the career of Alfred Hill is fully described in *A Distant Music* (Oxford University Press, 1981), and most recently the *Biographical Dictionary of New Zealand composers* (Victoria University Press, 1990) supplements the material in the latter part of this book and adds lists of works, writings and bibliographies.

I have seen my prime task as that of recovering as much of the buried history of music in New Zealand as possible to provide a perspective and restore the continuity of the tradition. The book has been brought up to 1990 to meet the requirements of the publisher. These later sections which have had to concentrate on highlights and the most significant personalities could have been three times as long, and many names worthy of mention have had to be omitted. The chapter on the New Zealand performer, expanded at the request of the

publisher, nevertheless had to concentrate on artists of international stature. An exception has been made in the chapter on choral music. As amateur music-making in New Zealand is predominantly choral the publisher felt that this should, therefore, be treated in more detail.

A work which could have extended to two or three volumes, if Māori music had been included, has here been compressed into one, thus making it, in a sense, a 'Concise Oxford History of New Zealand Music'. I hope, nevertheless, that it will do justice to its subject, will prompt explorations of areas that could only be touched on here and that it will stimulate pride in our musical achievements.

John Mansfield Thomson  
Wellington, November 1990

# Acknowledgements

Many people who have been extremely generous during the preparation of this book I now thank collectively and most warmly for their help. I am deeply conscious of my good fortune. I mention by name only those who have assumed a particularly arduous role, either in institutions or by reading sections of the manuscript. New Zealand librarians show a great spirit of initiative and the staffs of the Alexander Turnbull Library, the Wellington Central Library, National Archives in Wellington, the Auckland Public Library, the Auckland Institute, the Canterbury Museum, the Public Library in Dunedin, the Otago Early Settlers Museum in the same city, and the University libraries in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin have all earned my gratitude. To the Turnbull Librarian of the time, Mr J. E. Traue, and Miss Jill Palmer, Music Librarian, I owe a special debt, as to Miss Margery Walton who set the enterprise on the right path so long ago and to Margaret Loftus and other staff of the Ephemera Collection. The project has in many ways become indissolubly related to the Turnbull.

The Turnbull Endowment Trust, the Lilburn Trust, the Research Grants Committee of Victoria University of Wellington and the University of Otago have each contributed to the venture. I have an immense debt to the Stout Research Centre of the Victoria University of Wellington who appointed me as their first David Stout Research Fellow which allowed me to further several projects, notably this one, and lay foundations for others such as the recent *Biographical Dictionary of New Zealand Composers*.

I have depended greatly on the expertise of colleagues, friends and scholars who at various stages have read chapters of this book. These are Mary Boyd, formerly senior lecturer in Pacific history at Victoria University of Wellington, Dr John Steele, Professor of Music at the University of Otago, and Professor William R. Roff, of Columbia University of New York, each of whom responded to an earlier version. Subsequently Adrienne Simpson devoted her considerable musicological skills to pruning this into a shape which fitted the required limits. Richard Bolley carefully read this same earlier draft for the publisher, and subsequently I thank my publisher Anne French of Oxford University Press and my editor Ian Watt for their skills with the manuscript. Janet Paul has given it an elegant design.

The following kindly read and commented on individual chapters: Adrienne Simpson, Peter Downes and Jeremy Commons on opera; William Renwick, Guy Jansen, Judith Clark, Alan Thomas, Elizabeth Kerr, Warren Drake, David Sell, Hugh Price, John Drummond, David Farquhar and Peter Walls on education; Rona Bailey and Ashley Heenan on folksong, Dr Mervyn McLean,



Alan Thomas, Charles Royal and Helen Fisher on the meeting of the two cultures, Mervyn McLean and Alan Thomas on the frontier, Lyell Cresswell, Philip Liner, John Harrison and Dean Goffin on the bands, the late Walter Harris on silent film music and Helen Young on broadcasting. Nevertheless in a work of this kind the author is ultimately responsible and takes sole responsibility for his omissions and errors: he further begs readers to send any corrections to him care of the publisher.

Radio New Zealand Concert Programme staff have been constantly supportive and their resources constitute a major research archive of New Zealand music as do those of Radio New Zealand Sound Archives at Timaru which I first explored in the days of Angus Miller and A. M. Thomson. Other organizations which have similarly helped have been the Music Federation of New Zealand and the Orchestral Division of Radio New Zealand. John Casey and Brett Robertson of the Photography Department of Victoria University have provided invaluable services.

I thank my predecessors who wrote their pioneer theses, Margaret Campbell, Julia Moriarty, Angela Annabell and other such writers mentioned in the bibliography. It is a loss that much of their earlier work has never been published and certainly significant that much of it has been done by women. To those working in similar fields today such as Philip Norman, Ross Harvey, Martin Lodge and Valerie Harris, who with Philip Norman produced the Lilburn Festschrift, I give warmest thanks. We are fortunate indeed that New Zealand music is becoming so well documented. This book was commissioned by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council and the Australasian Performing Right Association and I acknowledge the constant support in a variety of ways, of Ashley Heenan and Douglas Lilburn, which has been crucial to its realization.

To my colleagues on *Early Music* in London during the periods when I was away from my editorial desk pursuing research in New Zealand, I owe a special debt: the smooth continuity of the journal was miraculously maintained. This was a feat perhaps less obvious to those who have never been involved in such an intricate specialist journal. Margot Leigh Milner spiritedly led the team, with Millicent Elliott, Jenny Cole, Robin Maconie, Richard Bolley, Mirka Zemanova and Richard Abram, all of whom staunchly held the fort with the co-operation of Mr Milbery of Headleys, a devoted printer of the old school and as good a friend of the journal. Our Advertising Manager Arthur Boyars and designers Roger Davies, Peter Campbell and Paul McAlinden, each played a notable part.

This may be one of those times when an author does not need to thank his secretary but instead give recognition to his particular brand of word processor. In initiating this regime Judith Binney of the History Department of the University of Auckland was a valued mentor and subsequently Forrest Chambers and Lisa Larkindale have kept the keys endlessly busy in a stimulating and highly valued dialogue. Suzanne Aspden also gave much help with research, I am appreciative of the contributions to the choral chapter made by John Rosser,



Peter Averì, Martin Setchell, Peter Adams and L. C. M. Saunders.

A book such as this is no individual enterprise but a bringing together of a network of collaborations: I thank each one of you who has made it possible.

JOHN MANSFIELD THOMSON

Wellington, August 1990

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# *The Māori World of Music*

*Ko te korimako ki te ngahere  
Ko te tangata ki te whenua*

*The song of the bellbird  
fills the forest with gladness  
Man sings and fills the land  
with joy.*

In waiata (traditional songs) both the incidents of the past and their high-born composers live again. Songs are not just formulae of notes and words, however beautiful, but a reforming of the community of the present, and in performance, a recollection of the community of the past. These songs put us in touch with ourselves, our identity, and our roots, for as we sing them the scenes of history and visions of ancestors pass dimly before our eyes and for a brief moment time coalesces and we and they are one. Songs are an indispensable part of community life and culture. They have the power to reach down into us to wrench our inner selves from their moorings and cause the world to glisten and we are reborn, reshaped, and revitalized.

The Māori world of music lies in two camps; traditional and modern. Within the traditional camp choices are limited but the modern camp opens up unlimited choices for absorption, adaptation, and reshaping within a bicultural dimension.

In early Māori society, all growth and creativity were under the influence of the gods. One created songs for a social or religious reason. It would be a bad omen if one sang without an obvious functional purpose. There were many opportunities to sing. The waiata chants were group expressions even though composed by an individual provoked in some way. The words would invariably allude to symbols of pride affecting the people. Their singing of the waiata would support those things with which they and the composer would identify. This would be performed in unison, with a melodic range of a 4th or a 5th. In these traditional songs the central melody returns to the droning note each time the melodic pattern is stated. A listener would note this pattern at the outset and settle back to give attention to the words and their message. Movement is mainly by steps upwards or downwards from the droning note with occasional leaps of a 3rd or 4th. Sliding microtonal embellishments and grace notes give interest and shape to the melodic pattern (rangi). There are songs which do not fit this general description but they are the exception to the rule and perhaps influenced by later cultural contacts.

Today there is a tendency not to produce the little 'niceties' that give the



A pūtōrino, a Māori flute from the North Island, detail. National Museum, Wellington

songs their special character but to concentrate on the words and the rhythmic pulse that drives the song along. This probably arises from group learning in cultural clubs and a measure of unfamiliarity with waiata style and language.

Traditional songs may be lullabies, laments, love songs, or justifications. They may confine themselves to simple expressions of their subject or range over complex accounts of history, geography, or genealogy. In an oral tradition these songs are an important record of the tribe and have been used effectively to counter contending land claims. Such songs were considered to be an important accompaniment to the whāikorero (formal speech). An appropriate song would give a stylistic finish to it.

Māori people loved the flute and held those who played them in high regard. Wondrous romantic tales were woven around them. It is claimed that players could literally make them talk and that words breathed into them could be carried by the simple notes of the song. Universally, love may be blind, but in the Māori world it apparently had a heightened auditory effect. The most common flute was the kōauau. Crafted in wood or bone, it was a stumpy tubular instrument with three holes bored into the top of it. Its piping but penetrating voice was sounded when air was blown across the opening at the top of the tube. In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest in the making and playing of the kōauau. There are three other kinds of flutes, the pūtōrino, the pōrutu and the nguru, each with a distinctive timbre; these have not enjoyed a popular revival, but may in time do so.

Modern music had its beginnings at the colonial stage of the country's development. There were two sources of influence; sailors and missionaries. Both were to contribute to the expanding diatonic horizon of Māori musical life. But from the beginning when the two cultures met, the greatest musical influence came from the missionaries. They built churches and set up schools in the villages and pursued the teaching of the gospel and the singing of hymns. They became proficient in the Māori language and used it as the medium for teaching. In no time they had the Māori on the road to literacy in their own language. They were solicitors of the welfare of their converts in view of the impending colonization that would inevitably follow. Thus they exerted political pressure to safeguard Māori interests and their own in terms of land acquisition. The Māori's trust of the missionaries virtually guided his footsteps to the signing table of the Treaty of Waitangi.

The land wars fomented by the colonial government's neglect of the Treaty caused severe dislodgment of Māori life style. Without a shared power base as provided for in the Treaty, and the reality of legislative victimization, and loss of traditional resources, the Māori were at a great disadvantage. It was impossible for them to adapt effectively and naturally to the imported culture and its entrenching institutions on Māori terms, and they were reduced to a state of dependency and forced to accept a policy of assimilation.

During the early period the churches remained the strongest European

institution to influence and modify Māori cultural patterns. This was done on Māori terms. Indeed the Maori people formed their own churches to serve their cultural aspirations more closely. The language for the service and hymns was Māori. Some churches adopted the chanting of scriptures waiata-style rather than diatonic hymns.

In the transition to hymn tunes the Māori had difficulty in negotiating widely spaced intervals and coping with extended melodic range while keeping in tune. The carry-over of sliding techniques proved disastrous to the melody. They were blissfully unconcerned with timing but dragged their way to an agonizing end. How the missionaries must have suffered. But with the patience of Job, and judging that the redeeming end would justify the painful means, they persevered. The Maori today still tend to drag their hymns which they immensely enjoy singing. In the long run, hymn singing had the effect of opening up possibilities of a new and exciting range of tonal experience.

This was certainly the case of the adherents of one church in particular. By 1881 when the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Hunga Tapu) opened its Māori mission, the Māori converts were prepared to embrace both the doctrines and the choral tradition of the church. In 1886 the first annual conference (Hui Tau) was held. In later years music was to become an important feature of the Hui Tau, and in time influenced the choral development of the annual conferences of other churches. The church school, the Maori Agriculture College (M.A.C.) at Korongata, Hastings, opened its doors to students in 1913. On its staff was a teacher of vocal and instrumental music. The following year, a well known Māori music teacher who had trained in the States joined the all-American faculty. The music department featured a band, a choir and a glee club. In 1915 the band went on an extensive tour of several towns in Manawatu, Taranaki, King Country, Bay of Plenty, Auckland and Northland. This was probably the first time that many Māori in the audience had seen Māori instrumentalists in a band, and realized that this was an attainable goal. On 3 February 1931 the buildings crumbled in the Napier earthquake. Luckily the school had not convened for the new term. It was never rebuilt. However its influence had been felt in the musical life of a large number of Māori communities. Many instrumentalists of brass, wind and piano emerged to form bands and to conduct choirs. Meanwhile the annual church conference (Hui Tau) was going from strength to strength and featuring a cultural and choral competition. The choral section format would include a ladies' trio and ladies' chorus, and a men's quartet and chorus. The choir competition would be the crowning event and the massed choir the *pièce de résistance*. These competitions generated enthusiastic response and the announcements of the selected pieces, which might include selections from musicals and oratorios, would be eagerly awaited and worked on for the rest of the year.

The Hui Tau is no longer held, but the choral tradition has passed to the annual conferences of other churches modelled after the Hui Tau format. These



A pūtōrino. National Museum, Wellington



A kōauau or Māori flute. Brian Brake. National Museum Wellington

were the Anglican Hui Topu (1946), the Catholic Hui Aranga (1947) and such like.

Other groups in their time have shared the choral glory: The Ohinemutu Rotorua Maori Choir founded in the late 1920s provides an interesting example of vocal transition from the melismatic waiata singing to western choral techniques, while the memory of Seymour's Methodist choir still lingers after the sound of their disciplined singing has faded. The Te Arohanui group's 150 voice choir displayed the best of the Hui Tau choral tradition when they attended the opening of the Polynesian Centre in Hawaii in 1963 and the American mainland. In 1974 the backing group to the winning Commonwealth Games song went on to form the New Zealand Maori Chorale for recording purposes with overseas markets in mind. The choral section of the Aotearoa Festival of Arts shows some innovative groups using original compositions, movements (choralography) and artistic positional changes (choreography), imparting a strong feeling of theatre. 1989 saw the formation of the National Māori Choir. In 1990 it featured a massed choir singing a repertoire of Māori 'favourites'. Perhaps this group may yet take up the *kākahu* (cloak) of massed voices which was once the feature of the Māori choral scene.

Today there is a renewed interest in Māoritanga. It originated early this century in the work of a group of young men which became known as the Young Maori Party. The three giants of the group were Te Rangi Hiroa (Peter Buck) anthropologist; Maui Pomare, medical practitioner; and Apirana Ngata, lawyer. All saw parliament as holding the key to Māori grievances. All became parliamentarians. Apirana Ngata retained strong links with the Māori world during his forty years in parliament. He was able to regenerate pride in Māori culture through the revival of Māori arts, crafts, songs and oral traditions.

With the cultural resurgence, interest in the collecting and learning of waiata tawhito (ancient songs) ignited. This flame was fanned by the formation of cultural clubs, beginning with Ngati Poneke of Wellington in 1935 which had been functioning under the Anglican Maori Mission welfare services for a number of years. Since then there has been a proliferation of culture clubs throughout the country. These clubs are found everywhere in communities and schools, all serving the same purpose in fostering the performing arts and taking part in ceremonial occasions.

A sense of theatre has always been part of Māori community life responding to the ritual imperatives of oral traditions. The marae was a theatre in which all players, following strict protocol, would play their part, and the performances would be eagerly watched and critically appraised. The presentation would be in oratory, song and dance. The occasion could be a *pōwhiri* (welcome), a *tangihanga* (funeral) or a *hui* (conference) called for a specific purpose. The marae was the centre-point of public display. It is not a wonder then that when Maggie Papakura of Rotorua toured with her concert party to Great Britain in 1911, a carved meeting house went with her. The stage would become a marae in



very essence. It is only in the last thirty years that this cultural concept has been replaced by an awareness of the stage as being theatre and not necessarily subject to marae protocol. This was undoubtedly influenced by the expanding experience of live theatre by the Māori in drama, musicals and opera in the 1960s.

The Arawa people were the first to see the commercial possibilities of the tourist trade; they were located in the thermal sights and spas of Rotorua, a popular tourist area. The concert party was the response to this situation. Other areas followed this example but went on tour to find their audience. Invariably the aim would be to raise funds for some worthwhile project, which could be marae related. But seldom would a concert party endure beyond the achievement of its goal. It would disband and regroup whenever the need arose. Not until the culture clubs became established with the aim of promoting the performing arts as a heritage, was the reason for its continued existence sufficiently strong to retain interest and ongoing commitment. Also the advent of the regional and national competitions (the Aotearoa Festival of Arts) became a powerful incentive for clubs to produce original works and strive to raise their standard of performance to a high artistic level.

The instrument favoured by the early concert party and club was the piano. This gave a reassuring framework of broad chordal accompaniment and carried the singing forward in strength. With this backing there was no need for harmony. The focus was on the projection of melody, the words and movements and the haka effects to give tension and excitement, until the final release in the exultant expiration, 'Auē Hei!'

The piano was ideal when the audience came to the marae, but its transportation was a problem when the group performed at another venue. Guitars replaced the pianos in the late 1940s when the concert parties travelled to their audiences; to hotel venues and tourist ships. Their continued popularity across the broad spectrum of contemporary music has assured them of a permanent place in the Māori performing arts. Even earlier, in the 1920s and 30s, most of the dance bands in the eastern provinces were Māori or had Māori participants. In every Māori community the marae dining hall would double as a dance hall on Saturday nights. A pianist would be the sole orchestra or be assisted by a saxophonist and drummer. There would be many celebratory occasions which would bring the whole community to the hall and would provide opportunities for local musicians with a variety of instruments to make music. Today many halls have an ageing piano pushed into a corner as a relic of a bygone florescence, which no longer hears the shuffling feet of dancers, as the succeeding generations have moved on to other social diversions.

The pop scene brought new amplified instruments, new exciting sounds, new combinations of instruments. The glittering pathway from the village hall to the fantasies of a world stage was starlit by television and glamour promotions. This resulted in a flow of Māori musicians and singers onto the Australian and Asian entertainment circuit. Others went on promotional programmes to

countries targeted for local products while some culture clubs linked into the summer folk festivals of Europe.

Beat music had brought to the fore many Māori top bands. One of the most popular bands to dominate the entertainment awards was 'Herbs', with its particular style of Pacific reggae. 'Ardijah' won the first Rheineck rock award in 1988. In the same year a group of unemployed youths, 'Mokai', formed under a work-skill programme, won the band section of the television programme, *Star Quest*. Bands like the popular 'Aotearoa', the all-women 'Black Katz', 'Dread Beat', the access training troupe, 'Kahurangi', 'Mana', 'Meg and the Fones', and 'Styx and Shanty', endorsed their reputation with successful record releases. From these groups have come a wealth of original music in either English or Māori or a mixture of both. These groups are among those who perform throughout the country where people gather to drink, muse and mutter, or on talent shows, showcases and festivals.

Puatatangi, the music advisory committee of the Council for Maori and South Pacific Arts and the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, have joined together in a promotional project to assist emergent Maori bands to break into the recording scene. Their 'Rourou e Rua' (two baskets) project launched in 1989 attracted a number of new bands. These were featured at the Indigenous Music Festival during the Waitangi celebrations of 1990.

One important genre, that of the brass band, should receive a mention in a survey such as this. The brass band has had a strong and continuing association with the Ratana church. Brass bands also appear with the Kingitanga movement, and there is the historical attachment of a brass drum accompaniment to the poi dance of Te Atiawa of Taranaki. One significant recent development has been the formation of the 'Te Peene o Aotearoa', the Aotearoa Maori Band in 1989. Although promoted mainly by brass band enthusiasts of the Ratana church it has drawn its membership from a wide sector of Maoridom. At the Waitangi celebrations of 1990 this national band impressed with its high standard of musicianship and drill.

In conclusion, it can be confidently said that today Māori music is in good heart. At best it is still community music with a strong traditional heritage and an active adaptation of new music in a variety of situations. The question arises 'Why is this Māori music?' The answer may lie in the historian's observation: 'The two races came to live largely in separate worlds.' For the past 150 years this has been so, and no more so than in the field of music. Cultural survival makes it imperative that Māori people preserve those things which contribute to Māori identity.

TE PUOHO KATENE