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Parading Kiwis:

New Zealand Soldier Concert Parties, 1916–1954

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in History.

The University of Auckland, 2012.

Abstract

During the First and the Second World Wars, soldier concert parties entertained the troops with fast-paced musical and comedy sketches that drew on the performers' and the audiences' shared attraction to modern, popular entertainment. These concert parties are usually regarded as a side show to the wider war effort, their value found only in their contribution to maintaining soldier morale. In this thesis the concert parties take centre stage; they are the entry-point for a re-evaluation of some of the social and cultural narratives that have been employed to interpret this period in New Zealand history. Of particular interest is their relationship with the nation and nationalist expression, the models of masculinity they upheld and challenged, and how examining the place of the shows' star performers — the female impersonators — can contribute to our understanding of contemporary attitudes surrounding gender, sexuality and the body.

The Kiwis and the New Zealand Pierrots from the Great War, and the Kiwi Concert Party from World War II were remarkably popular with soldier audiences during the war. For the New Zealand Pierrots and the Kiwi Concert Party this wartime success became the platform for immensely successful careers as commercial revue companies after the war, when they reinvented themselves as the Diggers and the Kiwis Revue Company respectively. Both troupes enjoyed long careers touring Australasia. The Diggers were still performing in the early 1930s, while the Kiwis Revue Company retired from the stage in 1954 having enjoyed over three million paid admissions.

Whereas accounts of New Zealand's involvement in the two world wars are frequently confined to a focus on the nation and a restrictive image of the soldier, the historical actors examined here reveal far more ambiguous attitudes towards nationalism and masculinity. By exploring what happened when entertainers and audiences took their places at the concert party performance, this thesis illustrates the ways in which the cultural nationalist framework that has been so pervasive in New Zealand history writing has obscured many of the people, emotions and events that are part of New Zealand's past.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
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| AJHR | Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives |
| ANZ | Archives New Zealand, Wellington |
| ATL | Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington |
| AWMA | Australian War Memorial Archive, Canberra |
| AWMM | Auckland War Memorial Museum |
| GGSC | George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries |
| RNZNSA | Radio New Zealand National Sound Archive |

Introduction:

A Song to Start the Show

In early 1941, when Terry Vaughan was approached to join a newly formed army concert party he met the offer with scepticism. A recent graduate of London's Royal Academy of Music, before the outbreak of the Second World War Vaughan had been developing a career as a pianist, conductor and composer. For him a 'concert party' conjured up images of pierrot costumes and sentimental ballads, material that he believed belonged in the First World War.¹ Furthermore, he had not signed up for the army to play music; he was a soldier and was reluctant to leave his friends in the 34th Anti-tank Battery.²

The concert party that wanted Vaughan had grown out of a performance organized in October 1940 by Sergeant-Major Tom Kirk-Burnnand at Maadi Camp, near Cairo. Lieutenant-General Bernard Freyberg was in attendance that night and was impressed enough to envisage a permanent place for the troupe as the New Zealand Division's Entertainment Unit.³ The Maadi Camp show marked the birth of the Kiwi Concert Party, an institution that would continue for the next 14 years and in the process win the acclaim of both their soldier audience and the civilian crowds they performed for following the war. Reflecting on the invitation to join the Kiwis many years later, Vaughan claimed that his reluctance made very little difference; a week after being approached by Kirk-Burnnand he was officially transferred to the Entertainment Unit.⁴ By March 1941 Vaughan was officially part of the troupe and soon resolved his initial concerns. An integral member of the company, he even penned their opening number 'A Song to Start the Show' which, alongside 'Kiwis on Parade', became one of company's standards.⁵ In October 1941 Vaughan succeeded Kirk-Burnnand as the troupe's leader, a position he held for the next ten years.

¹ Terry Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go: The Story of the Kiwi Concert Party and Terry Vaughan*, Auckland, 1995, p.17; Terry Vaughan, Interviewed by John Rohde, LC-1324, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL).

² Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go*, p.21.

³ Tony Rex, "'The Kiwis': The Story of Kiwi Concert Party, October 1940 to January 1954', Unpublished Manuscript, p.1, MS 1624, Auckland War Memorial Museum (AWMM); Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go*, p.8.

⁴ *Auckland Star*, 18 February 1984, section B, p.3.

⁵ Terry Vaughan, Interviewed by John Rohde.

Vaughan was relieved to learn Kirk-Burnnand did not intend the Kiwi Concert Party to be a mere imitation of the entertainment troupes from the First World War. Both Vaughan and Kirk-Burnnand saw the Great War concert parties as amateurish soldier shows; they intended the Kiwi Concert Party to be a polished and thoroughly professional revue.⁶ Vaughan stressed that the Kiwis were 'not the popular idea of a soldier show', which he saw as consisting of sentimental ballads and tired jokes about army life. Instead, the Kiwis performed well known numbers from popular musicals and operettas, alongside original sketches, fashionable jazz favourites and some light classical numbers.⁷ Vaughan's ambition was to give his audience 'a taste of civvy street', that is, to reproduce the kinds of modern entertainment they consumed while on leave in London, or back home in New Zealand.⁸

Although the Kiwis did not seek to reproduce the kind of entertainment seen in the First World War, the performances from the earlier war were significant in establishing how the Kiwis were viewed and evaluated. A programme produced for the Kiwis' first revue states that their show was dedicated to the New Zealand concert parties of the First World War, and for a number of senior military officials the Kiwis' performances brought to mind entertainment troupes they had enjoyed during the earlier war.⁹ In many ways it is hardly surprising that the Kiwis encouraged First World War veterans to nostalgically recall the concert parties of the Great War. The material may have been updated, but, like their First World War counterparts, the Kiwis performed on makeshift stages close to the front line, while their combination of popular songs and farcical sketches followed the standard concert party format.¹⁰ Furthermore, the starring roles remained the same; the female impersonators were consistently singled out for special praise.¹¹

The Kiwis' position as both distinguished from and connected to the concert parties of the First World War raises a number of questions about the nature of cultural change in the interwar years. The Kiwis may have adapted the revue to appeal to their

⁶ *Auckland Star*, 18 February 1984, section B, p.3.

⁷ Terry Vaughan, 'A Pedalpoint: The Kiwi Concert Party in North Africa', *Music in New Zealand*, 11, 1990, pp.33-34.

⁸ Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go*, p.23.

⁹ *Revue No.1* programme, Cyril Pasco, Kiwi Concert Party, Papers, MS 2002/53, AWMM; Concert completion certificates, MS-Papers-6522-3, ATL.

¹⁰ Terry Vaughan, Interviewed by John Rohde.

¹¹ Peter Downes, *Top of the Bill: Entertainers through the Years*, Wellington, 1979, pp.51, 77.

audience, but their enduring connection with this earlier tradition points to some of the continuities in the attitudes and values held by New Zealanders at war. Rather than examining concert parties in order to show a lighter side of military service, or to assert their importance to soldier morale, this thesis examines three concert parties — the Kiwis and the New Zealand Pierrots from the First World War and the Kiwi Concert Party from the Second World War — in order to explore aspects of social and cultural change in New Zealand.¹² In doing so this work offers an opportunity to reassess the place of the two world wars in New Zealand history.

The First and Second World Wars undoubtedly had a significant impact on New Zealand society. However, the tendency to see the two wars, and the First World War in particular, as critical turning points in the nation's history can obscure the continuities that run through this period or encourage us to see the changes that did occur as necessarily the consequence of the wars. This thesis steps back from a watershed approach and instead explores the ways in which these concert parties support, or unsettle, some claims about the effect of the wars on New Zealand history. Keith Sinclair's assertion that 'New Zealand announced its manhood' at Gallipoli fits within a tradition of writers who have reached for the nation when attempting to find meaning in New Zealanders' involvement in the two world wars.¹³ As Deborah Montgomerie has highlighted, these visionary generalisations are frequently done at the expense of analysis that can explore the effect of the war on 'changing intimate relationships or ideas about the wider world'.¹⁴ Sinclair's rhetoric of national 'manhood' illustrates the extent to which this nationalist expression was articulated through gender, yet, apart from Jock Phillips' *A Man's Country?*, little has been done to analyse the registers of masculinity that influenced how soldiers' experience at war was articulated and interpreted.¹⁵ The soldier concert parties provide a productive entry-point for a

¹² This thesis is not intended to be an account of all entertainment provided for, or by, New Zealand soldiers at war. Such an approach, especially if it has inflexible connection with the nation, is likely to only reassert claims of national distinctiveness.

¹³ Keith Sinclair with Raewyn Dalziel, *A History of New Zealand*, rev edn, Auckland, 2000, p.241. A short list of texts with similar claims includes; O.E. Burton, *The Silent Division: New Zealanders at the Front, 1914–1919*, Sydney, 1935, p.15; W. P. Morrell, *New Zealand*, London, 1935, p.112; Christopher Pugsley, *Gallipoli: The New Zealand Story*, Auckland, 1984, p.21; Glynn Harper, ed., *Letters from the Battlefield: New Zealand Soldiers Write Home, 1914–18*, Auckland, 2001, p.14.

¹⁴ Deborah Montgomerie, 'Reconnaissance: Twentieth-Century New Zealand War History at Century's Turn', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 37, 1, 2003, p.72.

¹⁵ Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male — A History*, Auckland, 1987, pp.131–216

reassessment of soldiers' connection with the nation and what they saw as suitably masculine behaviour.



The New Zealand concert parties of the First World War emerged from a community of like-minded entertainment troupes that responded to a demand for entertainment from weary soldiers. British concert parties such the Follies of the 4th Division and the Fancies of the 6th were at the forefront of the tradition, and their lead was soon followed. By the end of 1916 most divisions serving the British Empire had an official concert party.¹⁶ The Kiwis, the New Zealand Division's only full-time concert party, were formed at the request of the division's commander, Major-General Andrew Russell, as part of an effort to maintain soldiers' morale after the tragic losses at the battle of the Somme. Other troupes, however, had more spontaneous beginnings.¹⁷ The New Zealand Pierrots grew out of impromptu performances arranged by Tano Fama and Stan Lawson at the division base camp in Etaples.¹⁸ The troupe spent the remaining war years performing for soldiers who passed through the camp, as well as embarking on tours of France, Belgium and England, playing in camps, hospitals and theatres along the way.¹⁹ Over the course of the war both the Kiwis' and the New Zealand Pierrots' shows developed from being loose collections of popular songs and comic sketches to polished revues that combined original material with highlights from the best loved musical comedies of the time.²⁰

For most of those who performed in soldier concert parties during the Great War their time with the company ended when peace was declared. For some, however, peace marked the start of a new enterprise as concert parties regrouped to entertain civilian audiences. Under the leadership of Pat Hanna, the New Zealand Division's recreational and entertainment officer, the New Zealand Pierrots were reformed and rebranded as the Diggers as part of an effort to prevent boredom and maintain morale while troops

¹⁶ J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914–1918*, Oxford, 1991, p.96.

¹⁷ Ernest McKinlay, *Ways and by-Ways of a Singing Kiwi: With the N.Z. Divisional Entertainers in France*, Dunedin, 1939, p.95; Downes, *Top of the Bill*, p.49.

¹⁸ George Clyne Lyttleton, 'Pierrots in Picardy: a khaki chronicle, by one of them', Unpublished Manuscript, p.35, MS242, AWMM.

¹⁹ G.D. Bolton, *Warrior Entertainers: The Story of the 'Digger Pierrots' of the New Zealand Army in World War I*, Sydney, 1997, p.5; Downes, *Top of the Bill*, p.57.

²⁰ McKinlay, pp.77, 103; Downes, *Top of the Bill*, p.57; Lyttleton, p.58.

awaited demobilisation.²¹ After performing at camps and theatres around Europe, word of the Diggers' popularity reached New Zealand and plans were put in place for a national tour.²² Having conquered New Zealand the Diggers signed with J.C. Williamson Limited and, in March 1920, set off on a commercial tour of Australia.²³ The Diggers were embraced by Australian audiences. Their tours of both New Zealand and Australian continued for more than a decade. Over time the troupe gradually evolved as new members arrived and others departed. As the Diggers' connection with the wartime concert party diminished they gradually shifted from being seen as a specifically New Zealand wartime concert party to appealing to a more inclusive 'digger' culture.²⁴

When the New Zealand military revived the concert party format during the Second World War, the Kiwi Concert Party was presented as the centrepiece of the New Zealand military entertainment. Unlike the Great War concert parties, the Kiwi Concert Party was officially integrated into the division as its own military unit, the New Zealand Entertainment Unit.²⁵ While Vaughan may have stressed the modern and up-to-date nature of the shows to distinguish their performances from troupes from the earlier war, this effort to keep up with the changing tastes and demands of their soldier audiences marked a continuity in concert party performances. Just like their counterparts from the Great War, the soldiers who danced and sang onstage, and those who applauded them, valued entertainment that reflected their position within a transnational culture of popular entertainment.

Like the Diggers before them, the Kiwis used their popularity with soldiers to launch a career as a commercial revue company in the years following the war. Their place in the public's post-war imagination had already been cemented thanks to a 1943 nationwide tour when the Entertainment Unit returned to New Zealand on furlough. This circuit foreshadowed their phenomenally successful career as a civilian revue

²¹ Downes, *Top of the Bill*, p.58.

²² *Grey River Argus*, 8 July 1919, p.4.

²³ Miscellaneous - NZEF [New Zealand Expeditionary Force] Diggers concert party - Correspondence, AD 1 1045/65/233, Archives NZ, Wellington (ANZ); Peter Downes, 'Hanna, George Patrick 1888-1973', Dictionary of New Zealand Biography (DNZB), online, n.p., <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4h14/1>, accessed 7 September 2011.

²⁴ Richard Fotheringham, 'Diggers Company', in Victoria Chance and Philip Parsons, eds, *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, Sydney, 1995, p.191.

²⁵ Downes, *Top of the Bill*, p.77.

Introduction



Figure 1.1: The New Zealand Pierrots in England, 1918, 1/2-014066-G, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington (ATL).



Figure 1.2: Kiwi Concert Party, El Alamein, Egypt, Oct 1942, DA-02711-F, ATL.

company. Shortly after the Entertainment Unit returned to Europe post-furlough, a number of the concert party performers who were among the hundreds of men who were declared medically unfit to return to Europe formed a private revue company and performed for the New Zealand public as the Kiwis. Vaughan took over management of the commercial revue company after the war, supplementing the group with performers from the Entertainment Unit. Between 1946 and 1954 the troupe continuously toured New Zealand and Australia as the Kiwis Revue Company, enjoying over three million paid admissions in the process.²⁶ Whether performing during the war at home or abroad, or in the post-war period, the Kiwis' performers presented a vision of veterans who could effectively cope with the transition to civilian society, yet still hold on to their positive memories and experiences from military service.



Soldier concert parties usually go unmentioned in overviews of New Zealand's involvement in the two world wars, and when they are discussed they are rarely subjected to close analysis.²⁷ Published histories of the First World War that appeared in the immediate aftermath of the war generally referred to soldiers enjoying 'pierrot shows' or 'concert parties', without directly naming the groups involved, reflecting the commonalities between shows in this informal network of amateur performers.²⁸ Entertainment was frequently discussed alongside other rest activities organized for soldiers such as the popular sports events; the two were presented as playing a similar role in relieving the monotony of military service and maintaining the morale of the soldiers.²⁹ This emphasis on morale reflects a tendency within earlier military histories to primarily judge the interest or value of an event or group by the contribution they were seen to have made to the war effort. Early histories of the Second World War dealt

²⁶ Tony Rex, fl 1940–1988, Papers relating to the Kiwi Concert Party, MS-Group-0807, ATL.

²⁷ Soldier concert parties are not covered in the two major edited collections on New Zealand involvement in the First and Second World War, John Crawford and I. C. McGibbon, eds, *New Zealand's Great War: New Zealand, the Allies and the First World War*, Auckland, 2006; John Crawford, ed., *Kia Kaha: New Zealand in the Second World War*, Auckland, 2000. Nor are they mentioned in Roberto Rabel's chapter on war in the *New Oxford History of New Zealand*: Roberto Rabel, 'New Zealand's Wars', in Giselle Byrnes, ed., *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, South Melbourne, 2009, pp.245–68.

²⁸ W.S. Austin, *The Official History of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade (the Earl of Liverpool's Own): Covering the Period of Service with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the Great War from 1915 to 1919*, Wellington, 1924, p.473; Burton, *The Silent Division*, pp.280–82.

²⁹ W. H. , Cunningham, C. A. L. Treadwell, J. S. Hanna, *The Wellington Regiment (NZE) 1914–1919*, Wellington, 1928, p.262; John Robertson, *With the Cameliers in Palestine*, Dunedin, 1938, pp.195–99.

with concert parties in much the same way, briefly assessing their value to the wider war effort by highlighting the role they played in providing moments of relief for soldiers.³⁰ More recent works, such as Michael King's *New Zealanders at War*, which aimed to portray the war as it was experienced by ordinary soldiers, also mentioned the popularity of soldier concert parties near the front line. Such works do little more than identify concert parties as a source of entertainment.³¹

The most detailed records of the troupes' activities come from the memoirs of those who were directly involved in the concert parties. These memoirs provide valuable information on the day-to-day life of the concert party performers, but also reveal a desire among the performers to assert the value of their contribution to the wider war effort.³² In an account of his time with the WWI Kiwis, Ernest McKinlay emphasized the continued support and interest of Major-General Andrew Russell. According to McKinlay, Russell's support allowed performers to disregard any criticism they faced from those who believed they should be in the front line.³³ In a similar manner John Reed from the WWII Kiwi Concert Party proudly recalled the genuine praise from General Freyberg, commander of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, that they were of greater use to the division as the Entertainment Unit than they would have been as individuals in the front line forces.³⁴

The memoirs and diaries of soldiers not directly involved in the concert parties occasionally mention shows they attended, but this is rarely more than a passing remark.³⁵ Soldiers such as Henry Parmenter, a sergeant with the signal division during the First World War, might have taken pride in believing 'our pierrots take some beating', but for others these shows just became a routine moment of relief in military life.³⁶ A diary entry from William Ahier, a private with the Auckland Infantry Regiment, on 7 February 1917 reads: 'Boots freeze at night. Water & tea frozen almost

³⁰ Jim Henderson, *22 Battalion*, Wellington, 1958, p.197; A. L. Kidson, *Petrol Company*, Wellington, 1961, p.263; Frazer D. Norton, *26 Battalion*, Wellington, 1952, p.439.

³¹ Michael King, *New Zealanders at War*, rev. edn, Auckland, 2003, pp.188–91.

³² McKinlay, p.47; Reed, p.80; Vaughan, p.42.

³³ McKinlay, p.92.

³⁴ Reed, p.80.

³⁵ Cecil Coughlan's entry can be seen as typical: 'Went along to see the Kiwi party, good show'. 25 August 1944, Cecil Coughlan and Garrie Coughlan, *Diary of a Kiwi Soldier in World War II*, Auckland, 2006, n.p.

³⁶ Henry Edley Parmenter, 1891–1984, War diary, 9 October 1917, MS-1760, ATL.

immediately. To billet at Rue Bataille. Pictures and 'Pierrots' at Kapai Theatre'.³⁷ While Ahier's entry presents the pierrot show as just another mundane activity in a day of military service, he went to see the performers again two days later, suggesting his unenthusiastic prose may say more about his habits as a writer than his enjoyment of the entertainment.³⁸

Like the New Zealand historiography, international literature on soldier concert parties frequently centres on the role of the performances in maintaining troop morale. J.G. Fuller's examination of concert parties in the British and Dominion armies during the First World War worked within this framework, but expanded upon it to consider how many of the institutions or attitudes from civilian life were replicated by soldiers to aid their emotional survival in the appalling conditions of war.³⁹ Fuller also considered the use of black and anti-authoritarian humour in the performances, suggesting that presenting soldiers' plight within a comedic stage show made those grievances seem more tolerable.⁴⁰ Additionally, jokes were frequently made at the senior officers' expense and were especially enjoyed if the officers were in the audience.⁴¹ While Fuller acknowledged these potential transgressions may have simply been tolerated due to their value in boosting troop morale, he also considered the value of this kind of humour in maintaining order. As the concert party stage became a controlled platform on which soldier grievances and frustrations could be expressed, it acted as a safety valve to help ensure resistance could be monitored and would not directly challenge military authority.⁴² Laurel Halladay's work on Canadian soldier concert parties from the Second World War continued a number of the ideas developed in Fuller's text.⁴³ Halladay presented the increase in attention to military entertainment by senior military administration as a response to the decline in morale among both soldiers and the Canadian public as the conflict wore on. The provision of stage entertainment, Halladay argued, sent a public message that military officials cared for their enlistees, without

³⁷ William Roland Ahier, 1894–1917, War diary, 7 February 1917, MS 2004/76, AWMM.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 9 February 1917.

³⁹ Fuller, pp.94–110, 175–80.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.100.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.101.

⁴² *ibid.*, p.109.

⁴³ Laurel Halladay, "'It Made Them Forget About the War for a Minute': Canadian Army, Navy and Air Force Entertainment Units During the Second World War", *Canadian Military History*, 11, 4, 2002, pp.20–35; Laurel Halladay, 'Doing Their Bit: Canada's Second World War Military Entertainers', PhD Thesis, University of Calgary, 2006.

having to directly address issues that were putting soldiers under greater danger than necessary.⁴⁴ Moreover, entertainment arranged by the military meant soldiers could stay at their bases during off duty hours and still be monitored by officers and the military police.⁴⁵

Whereas Halladay and Fuller examined the soldier concert parties to gain a fuller understanding of the wartime experience, in New Zealand's case, apart from the memoirs of those involved, the most comprehensive accounts of the soldier concert parties have primarily focused on the troupes' place within a history of New Zealand entertainment. Chris Bourke's profile on the Kiwi Concert Party appeared within a history of the 'lost dawn' of popular music in New Zealand and was chiefly concerned with their contribution to New Zealand's entertainment culture.⁴⁶ In a similar fashion, Peter Downes's account of the New Zealand soldier concert parties was part of a collection of profiles on prominent entertainers from New Zealand's past.⁴⁷ While Downes connected the troupes from the First and Second World Wars, stating that 'as far as entertainment was concerned, 1939 was 1914 all over again', he credited the WWII Kiwis with expanding on the talents and success of the earlier troupes.⁴⁸

By working the concert parties into a progressive history of New Zealand entertainment Downes placed the troupes within a narrative of national maturation. Matt Elliott's account of the 'Rise and Rise of New Zealand Comedy' also followed this trend, presenting the Kiwi Concert Party as precursors to a more nationally distinctive brand of comedy.⁴⁹ This attempt to work soldier concert parties into a narrative of national maturation is more even more prominent in work by Halladay and John Wilson on Canadian soldier concert parties. Wilson boldly proclaimed that 'if Canadian nationhood was won from its contribution to the First World War, concert parties ...

⁴⁴ Halladay, 'Doing Their Bit', p.51.

⁴⁵ Halladay, 'It Made Them Forget About the War for a Minute', p.23.

⁴⁶ Chris Bourke, *Blue Smoke: The Lost Dawn of New Zealand Popular Music, 1918-1964*, Auckland, 2010, pp. 138-44.

⁴⁷ Downes, *Top of the Bill*, pp.49-61, 76-85.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.77.

⁴⁹ Matt Elliot, *Kiwi Jokers: The Rise and Rise of New Zealand Comedy*, Auckland, 1997, pp.6-7.

provided the first national soundtrack'.⁵⁰ Halladay labelled World War II Canada's cultural 'big bang period' and worked military entertainment into this larger process.⁵¹

In addition to positioning Canadian soldier concert parties within a nationalist framework and establishing their importance in maintaining morale, Halladay examined the concert parties' role in the maintenance of masculine cohesion and homosociability within the military environment. She paid particular attention to the troupes' female impersonators, arguing that some representation of femininity was necessary to maintain the gender order among soldiers. Furthermore, Halladay argued, female impersonators contributed to the homosociability of the battlefield by reinforcing the maleness of the military, suggesting that the presence of 'real' women may have subverted the masculine nature of their military service.⁵²

As well as reflecting their status as the stars of most concert parties, the significant historiographical attention the female impersonators have received in recent years marks a growing interest in these shows beyond their contribution to the war effort. Halladay's interpretation of these drag performances provided a slight reworking of Fuller's earlier claim that female impersonators were seen as 'surrogate women', at once standing in for a sweetheart left behind and reminding soldiers of the elegance and comforts of home.⁵³ David Boxwell, however, has presented a more radical reworking of the 'surrogate women' thesis; Boxwell maintained that the viewer's gaze was knowingly directed at an effeminate, or at least feminine-acting man.⁵⁴ Military entertainment provided the appropriate stage on which female impersonation could be acted out, but audiences' interpretations were still framed by drag's cultural association with civilian homoerotic desire.⁵⁵ While Boxwell's work effectively challenged viewing female impersonators simply as 'surrogate women', the term 'surrogate women' reflects the rhetoric used by those who viewed the performances and is, therefore, valuable for developing an understanding of a common kind of audience response. Through the

⁵⁰ Wilson, p.1.

⁵¹ Halladay, 'Doing Their Bit', p.11.

⁵² Laurel Halladay, 'A Lovely War: Male to Female Cross-Dressing and Canadian Military Entertainment in World War II', in Steven P. Schacht and Lisa Underwood, eds, *The Drag Queen Anthology: The Absolutely Fabulous but Flawlessly Customary World of Female Impersonators*, New York, 2004, p.24.

⁵³ Fuller, p.106.

⁵⁴ David A. Boxwell, 'The Follies of War: Cross-Dressing and Popular Theatre on the British Front Lines, 1914-18', *Modernism/Modernity*, 9, 1, 2002, p.11.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.12.

adoption of feminine clothing and mannerisms sections of the audience saw the female impersonators as effectively becoming women.

Chris Brickell's brief examination of the Kiwi Concert Party within his wider study of gay New Zealand provides a productive contrast to earlier accounts of the New Zealand soldier concert parties. For Brickell, the value of the performances was not their contribution to soldier morale or their place in a national entertainment tradition; rather, Brickell claimed that the Kiwis' drag performances became a crucial space in which 'elements of queer cultures were paraded openly and to considerable acclaim'.⁵⁶ Brickell's work drew on a body of literature that presented these performances as crucial sites for understanding the experiences of gay soldiers during the Second World War.⁵⁷ Allan Bérubé argued that concert parties provided a 'gay refuge' within the American military's expanding anti-homosexual policies and claimed that military officials were engaged in a public relations campaign to obscure female impersonation's homoerotic subtext.⁵⁸ According to Bérubé, by the 1930s the 'golden age' of female impersonation had passed and drag performances were under attack by moral and religious crusaders. When military officials promoted soldier shows, they portrayed female impersonation as a tradition revived from the First World War, glossing over the gay bars and drag balls of the 1930s and 1940s.⁵⁹ Boxwell, Brickell and Bérubé all examined the female impersonators not to evaluate their contribution to the war effort, but in order to explore wider concerns regarding gender and sexuality. This thesis takes a similar approach, examining soldier concert parties not simply to evaluate their role in the war, but for their value as an interpretative tool for a cultural reading of the period.

Through their borrowing and reinterpretation of popular songs, comedy sketches and scenes from musical comedies, the soldier concert parties of the First and Second World Wars illustrate an engagement with a transnational entertainment culture that is frequently overlooked as historians work the wars into a narrative of national maturation. Through a critical awareness of the concert party performers' connection with a wider culture of popular entertainment, this thesis responds to Peter

⁵⁶ Chris Brickell, *Mates & Lovers: A History of Gay New Zealand*, Auckland, 2008, p.192.

⁵⁷ Allan Bérubé, *Coming out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two*, New York, 1990, pp.68–97; Paul Jackson, *One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military During World War II*, Montréal, 2004, pp.258–68.

⁵⁸ Bérubé, p.74.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.74.

Gibbons' call for New Zealand historians to be less preoccupied with the nationalist project of establishing 'New Zealand's place in the world' and to instead examine 'the world's place in New Zealand'.⁶⁰ While Gibbons' suggestion that historians should 'decentre or even dissolve "New Zealand" as a subject' presents a way of moving beyond nationalistic history writing, this thesis seeks to retain 'New Zealand' as a unit of historical analysis, but place it within a transnational framework.⁶¹ The concert parties of the First and Second World War all initially presented themselves as belonging to New Zealand. Discursively constructed or otherwise, 'New Zealand' was clearly important to them and should not be discounted.

Recent work by Miles Fairburn and Caroline Daley has presented some productive ways to retain, but decentre, the role of the nation in New Zealand history.⁶² In his examination of New Zealand exceptionalism, Fairburn argued that due to the occurrence of European settlement in New Zealand during the mid-nineteenth century revolution in transport and communication, New Zealand was inundated with metropolitan cultural influences before there was time for an autochthonous culture to develop. As a result, Fairburn reasoned, New Zealand culture emerged as a unique pastiche of four elements: Australian, New Zealand, American and British cultures.⁶³ Fairburn's work provides a productive avenue for thinking about cultural production and consumption in New Zealand; however, as Caroline Daley has highlighted, those looking at the world's place in New Zealand should examine the movement between spaces. New Zealand, Daley argued, is best understood as 'part of, not simply a receiving ground for, the new ideas and technologies that have shaped people's free time since the 1850s'.⁶⁴ Such an approach is valuable for examining the concert parties of both wars and reminds us that they were not simply reproducing British entertainment, but were active contributors within a network of like-minded performers.

⁶⁰ Peter Gibbons, 'The Far Side of the Search for Identity: Reconsidering New Zealand History', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 37, 1, 2003, p.47.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.39.

⁶² Gibbons, 'The Far Side of the Search for Identity', p.47; Miles Fairburn, 'Is There a Good Case for New Zealand Exceptionalism', in Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney, eds, *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand's Pasts*, Dunedin, 2006, pp.143–68; Caroline Daley, 'Women Endurance Swimmers: Dissolving Grease Suits and Decentring New Zealand History', *Sporting Traditions: the Journal of the Australian Society for Sports History*, 21, 2, 2005, pp.29–55; Caroline Daley, 'Modernity, Consumption, and Leisure', in Giselle Byrnes, ed., *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, South Melbourne, 2009, pp.423–46.

⁶³ Fairburn, p.150.

⁶⁴ Daley, 'Modernity, Consumption, and Leisure', p.445.

By recognising their connection with a wider culture of popular entertainment this thesis highlights a significant, yet often ignored, body of New Zealanders who valued the opportunity to see local entertainers perform familiar songs and sketches, regardless of whether they contributed to a national 'home in thought'.⁶⁵ While historians such as Keith Sinclair and Peter Gibbons have portrayed New Zealand in the early twentieth century, and during the 1920s in particular, as a place of cultural isolation and dreary conformity, this has become increasingly challenged by work that has focused on New Zealand's place within a transnational leisure culture.⁶⁶ In contrast to James Belich's portrayal of a 'tight society' between 1880 and 1930, recent scholarship has recognized New Zealanders' engagement with a modern consumerist culture.⁶⁷ New work that has examined New Zealanders' time spent shopping, dining out or enjoying entertainment on both the screen and stage reveal a level of participation in a consumer culture that has been frequently ignored in histories that have focused on the exceptional, the productive and the rural at the expense of the transnational, the consumerist and the urban.⁶⁸

This portrayal of the 1920s as dreary and conformist stems from a particular reading of the interwar period, one that connects the emergence of an intellectual nationalist tradition in the 1930s with a wider change in the national climate of opinion. As Chris Hilliard has stated, E.H. McCormick's *Letters and Art in New Zealand* is the decisive text in asserting the significance of high culture in the development of a

⁶⁵ The phrase 'home in thought' has been misattributed to Robin Hyde by John Beaglehole, amongst others. As W.L. Renwick has demonstrated, the phrase was originally used by Eric Cook, associate editor of the Canterbury College student magazine, in an editorial which discussed the first issue of the literary journal *Phoenix*. W. L., Renwick, 'Show Us These Island and Ourselves... Give Us a Home in Thought', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 21, 2, 1987, p.199.

⁶⁶ P.J. Gibbons, 'The Climate of Opinion', in W.H. Oliver with B.R. Williams, eds, *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, Wellington, 1981, pp.314–15; Keith Sinclair with Raewyn Dalziel, *A History of New Zealand*, rev. edn, Auckland, 2000, p.267.

⁶⁷ James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000*, Auckland, 2001, pp.121–25.

⁶⁸ Danielle Sprecher, 'The Right Appearance: Representations of Fashion, Gender, and Modernity in Inter-War New Zealand, 1918–1939', MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1997; Helen B. Laurenson, *Going Up, Going Down: The Rise and Fall of the Department Store*, Auckland, 2005; Charlotte Burgess, 'Looking to the Heart: Young People, Romance and Courtship in Interwar New Zealand', MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 2007; John Griffiths, 'Popular Culture and Modernity: Dancing in New Zealand Society 1920–1945', *Journal of Social History*, 41, 3, 2008, pp.611–32; Charlotte Greenhalgh, 'Bush Cinderellas: Young New Zealanders and Romance at the Movies, 1919–1939', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 44, 1, 2010, pp.1–21; Perrin Rowland, *Dining Out: A History of the Restaurant in New Zealand*, Auckland, 2010; Aleisha Ward, 'Anzac, Hollywood and Home': Constructing a New Zealand Jazz Culture', in Henry Johnson, ed., *Many Voices: Music and Antional Identity in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Newcastle, 2010, pp.93–102; Clare Rachel Slako, 'Chautauqua: In the Space between New Zealand and the United States', MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 2011.

national consciousness and establishing national identity as the metanarrative principle that structured subsequent texts such as Sinclair's *A History of New Zealand*.⁶⁹ While less overtly concerned with asserting national identity, Peter Gibbons argued that the 1930s saw the emergence of a 'more critical, open society' that was intimately tied to the intellectual consequences of the depression.⁷⁰ Yet, the effect this shift in the production of high art had on New Zealand culture in the sense of the 'habits, rituals and ways of life of a people' is much more uncertain.⁷¹ While Tobias Harper has questioned whether those who lived through this time were conscious of the apparent cultural stagnation of the 1920s and the 'breakthrough' of the 1930s, an analysis of the concert parties of the two world wars offers an opportunity to consider whether these developments influenced more populist forms of entertainment.⁷² Furthermore, the portrayal of the Second World War concert parties as tied to those from the Great War suggests the troupes provide an instructive avenue through which to explore the nature of cultural change over the interwar period.

The concert parties provide an uncomfortable contrast for some of the interpretive frameworks that have been employed to understand the first half of the twentieth century. In the same way the soldiers who got up onstage to sing and dance, and those in the crowd who applauded them for doing so, allow for an alternate reading of the place of soldiers in accounts of New Zealand masculinity. While Jock Phillips' *A Man's Country?* emphasized the role of war in the development of a male culture hostile towards home and women, recent scholarship has highlighted experiences of soldiers that disrupt his portrayal of the 'man's man' of war living within an inflexible homosocial culture.⁷³ Chris Brickell, for example, drew upon photographs and diaries to effectively argue that intimacy between soldiers was more widespread than Phillips suggested, while Deborah Montgomerie argued that the letter writing practices of New Zealand soldiers suggest a greater level of affection for domesticity and feminine values than is allowed in Phillips' portrayal of two distinct cultures and value systems for men

⁶⁹ Chris Hilliard, 'Colonial Culture and the Province of New Zealand History', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 32, 1, 2002, pp.82–85.

⁷⁰ Gibbons, 'The Climate of Opinion', p.342.

⁷¹ Jock Phillips, 'Of Verandahs and Fish and Chips and Footie on Saturday Afternoon: Reflections on 100 Years of New Zealand Historiography', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 24, 2, 1990, p.119.

⁷² Tobias Joel Harper, 'Keeping the Faith: Religious Belief in 1920s New Zealand', MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 2006, p.5.

⁷³ Phillips, *A Man's Country?*, p.216.

and women.⁷⁴ In a similar manner, soldier concert parties sought to comfort soldiers with memories of home and peacetime pleasure and present a vision of masculinity at odds with accounts that have emphasized heroism and bravery on the battlefield, or the bawdy behaviour of soldiers at rest. From the First World War to the Second these sentiments became more apparent. Whereas the First World War troupes frequently performed in military uniform and were promoted as 'warrior entertainers', the WWII Kiwi Concert Party banished their uniforms to better give 'a taste of civvy street'.⁷⁵



Chris Brickell's work on the Kiwi Concert Party was concerned with their place within a narrative charting the greater visibility of queer identities in New Zealand culture. This thesis builds on that work to consider how the concert parties of the two world wars contribute to a better understanding of the wider changes and continuities in New Zealand cultural life. Soldier concert parties provided more than just a morale boost; they constituted part of the way in which the wars were interpreted and remembered. A close engagement with how these shows were promoted, produced and received provides an opportunity to reassess some assumptions about the place of war in New Zealand history. While general histories of war have found meaning in the conflicts by fixing them to a nationalist narrative, a study of three specific soldier concert parties allows us to look at the experiences of a discrete group of soldiers and how their experiences at war fits within the course of their lives.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the responses to these shows gives an indication of the values and qualities that soldiers sought in their entertainers.

The first chapter of this thesis, therefore, critically examines the place of the nation within the soldier concert parties from the two world wars, as well as providing a closer account of the entertainment that was on offer. In doing so it explores how the troupes engaged with some of the nationalist narratives that have been developed in the writing of New Zealand history. While Downes and Bourke signaled the troupes' contribution to a national entertainment culture, this chapter explores their place

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, pp.213, 259; Deborah Montgomerie, *Love in Time of War: Letter Writing in the Second World War*, Auckland, 2005, p.134; Montgomerie, 'Anzac Anthems'; Brickell, p.91.

⁷⁵ Richard Fotheringham, 'Diggers Company', in Victoria Chance and Philip Parsons, eds, *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, Sydney, 1995, p.191; Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go*, p.23.

⁷⁶ Montgomerie, 'Reconnaissance', p.72.

within a transnational web of popular culture. Whereas the Kiwis were always identified as a New Zealand concert party, over the years the Diggers' connection with the nation gradually diminished as they were primarily identified with a trans-Tasman 'digger' culture. At first glance this shifting relationship with the nation appears to support Roberto Rabel's claim that there was a clearer 'New Zealand stamp' on the national war effort during the Second World War than there was during the earlier war.⁷⁷ Yet, whereas Rabel largely followed E.H. McCormick's lead by highlighting the effect of the intellectual cultural nationalist movement, there is nothing to suggest that this movement had any influence on the Kiwis. In fact, one of the few criticisms that was directed at the Kiwis was that their content lacked a specifically 'New Zealand character'.⁷⁸ In order to examine this shifting connection with the nation, rather than solely searching the performances for signs of a 'New Zealand stamp', this chapter will consider how these troupes were established and whether the nature of their respective careers and the troupes that surrounded them informed their relationship with the nation.

Alongside this narrative of national maturation, New Zealand history has also frequently been told as a story about masculinity and the development of 'a man's country'.⁷⁹ Therefore, the second chapter explores the masculinist framework that has informed the writing of New Zealand history. In doing so it considers how the model of masculinity the concert parties promoted fits with, or disrupts, some of the more familiar representations of military manliness as presented in New Zealand's historiography. The soldier entertainers' love of performance provides an instructive challenge to many portrayals of soldier masculinity, as does their commitment to producing a show that was clean and respectable. Furthermore, with their reliance on idealized images of peacetime pleasure during the war and wartime male bonding in their civilian tours, soldier concert parties were constantly engaged with connecting memories of home and war. In part, Chapter Two responds to Martin Francis' call for historians of masculinity to consider the ways in which men were continually seeking to reconcile the simultaneous, and seemingly contradictory, attraction to both domestic

⁷⁷ Rabel, 'New Zealand's Wars', pp.251, 258.

⁷⁸ *N.Z. Truth*, July 8 1953, p.4.

⁷⁹ Daley, 'Women Endurance Swimmers', p.46; Angela Wanhalla, 'Family, Community and Gender', in Giselle Byrnes, ed., *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, South Melbourne, 2009, pp.458–59.

responsibility and fantasies of heroic adventure and male bonding.⁸⁰ With their success both during the war and after, groups such as the Kiwi Concert Party reflected the restlessness and anxiety felt by soldiers at war, as well as the difficulties both soldiers and the wider public faced as veterans returned to civilian society.

While Jock Phillips argued that soldiers imagined home as feminine and held hostile attitudes towards women in civilian life, the concert party performances were abundant with sentimental references to domesticity and femininity.⁸¹ Perhaps the most obvious portrayals of femininity were the female impersonators, who were celebrated in the performances from both wars and are the focus of the third chapter. However, although their popularity remained constant across the two world wars, the nature of their performances and promotion shifted over time. During the First World War the most accomplished performers were praised for the natural characteristics and features that made them ideal for the role; however, by the Second World War the drag routines were understood as the result of a 'transformation', whereby the performers' ordinarily masculine identities were transformed as they became 'women' onstage. Examining the changing ways in which these drag performances were promoted and interpreted can provide some insights into contemporary concerns surrounding the performance of gender and sexuality. Female impersonators drew upon public intrigue with the ways in which gender boundaries could be challenged, but presented their show as a temporary spectacle, distinguishing it from the mundane behaviour through which gender is ordinarily reproduced. As Brickell and others have demonstrated, the female impersonators' connection with expanding homoerotic communities is significant, but through examining the routines within a larger context this chapter seeks to employ these performances to explore wider issues concerning gender, the body and sexuality.



In the epilogue of Ernest McKinlay's memoir of his time with the WWI Kiwis he observed that his readers 'might be excused for concluding that my personal war

⁸⁰ Martin Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity', *Historical Journal*, 45, 3, 2002, p.643.

⁸¹ Phillips, *A Man's Country?*, p.213.

service was spent, when not undergoing arduous journeys per horse box, in periodical visits to hospital, and trips to London, Paris, and the Riviera'. McKinlay continued:

[I]f I have dwelt overmuch on some of the latter more pleasing episodes of my long stay overseas, it is because I find (and I vouch for the fact that most other returned men also do), that it is the happier side of our active service life that is the more recurrent to us and, of course, all will admit, it is as well that it is so.⁸²

By focusing on the entertainment on offer behind the front line, this thesis also overlooks many of the dangers and horrors soldiers faced during their service. The tendency to emphasize the positive aspects of service life has led some to overstate the success of attempts to provide soldiers with moments of comfort, relief and normality. In a review of Alex Hedley's *Fernleaf Cairo: New Zealanders at Maadi Camp*, Les Cleveland, himself a veteran of the Second World War, contrasted his recollection of Maadi camp as 'a kind of Middle East gulag' with Hedley's depiction of a 'tourist odyssey with happy warriors enjoying tea and sandwiches at the New Zealand Forces Club'.⁸³ Cleveland's critique reflected not simply the frustration of a veteran whose memory of the war did not fit with an historical account, but illustrates the difficulties historians face as they attempt to reimagine the experience of soldiers relying on sources that are reluctant to dwell on the drudgery of military service, or in the case of concert party performers, often tell us more about their objectives than their audiences' responses. Accounts such as McKinlay's may present a sanitized image of war, but they are essential if we are to better understand the experience of non-combatant soldiers and their time spent behind the front line.

The aim of this thesis is not to claim that the concert parties of the First and Second World Wars made an invaluable contribution to the war effort, or that they were universally loved by soldiers and civilians. Indeed, as Cleveland asserted, '[n]ot everyone thought men dressed up as women in a smoke concert travesty of 1930s Kiwi male humour was amusing or entertaining'.⁸⁴ However, while Cleveland claimed that by focusing on New Zealand soldiers' experience with booze, brawls and brothels Hedley could have 'provided a more truthful account of the social life of the mass of

⁸² McKinlay, p.159.

⁸³ Alex Hedley with Megan Hutching, *Fernleaf Cairo: New Zealanders at Maadi Camp*, Auckland, 2009; Les Cleveland, 'Teacup Warriors', *New Zealand Books*, 19, 3, 2009, pp.17-18.

⁸⁴ Cleveland, p.17.

soldiery', the experience of concert party performers fits equally uncomfortably with the image of the larrikin soldier as it does the notion of a national identity forged at war.⁸⁵ As Alistair Thomson's work on Australian veterans has highlighted, many felt just as alienated by the image of the drinking, brawling, womanising soldier as they did the heroic rhetoric of Anzac Day parades and popular films.⁸⁶ Concert parties presented soldiers and the public with a portrayal of military manliness that valued respectability and creative talent, as well as recognising their place within a transnational culture of popular entertainment. In this sense the concert parties illustrate an engagement with modernity, consumption and popular culture within a site that is usually employed to emphasize the masculine, the productive and the nationalist. It is these kinds of apparent contradictions that indicate what can be discovered about New Zealand cultural life once 'A Song to Start the Show' has been sung.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Alistair Thomson, 'The Anzac Legend: Exploring National Myth and Memory in Australia', in Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, eds, *The Myths We Live By*, London; New York, 1990, p.79.

Chapter One

Kiwis on Parade:

National Narratives and Transnational Entertainment

When the Kiwis Revue Company toured New Zealand in 1953 *N.Z. Truth* highlighted the paucity of New Zealand content in their revue: '[t]here is so much talent in the company that one is left with a feeling of disappointment at its lack of New Zealand character'. The paper claimed that, instead, 'the Kiwis are content to imitate all the overseas patterns'.¹ Elsewhere, however, there was no shortage of nationalistic pride in the promotion of the Kiwis. The *Otago Daily Times*, for instance, proudly claimed them as 'New Zealand's Own'.² While *N.Z. Truth's* criticism suggests that those who sought entertainment that evoked a distinct national culture would have been disappointed with the Kiwis' show, their popularity implies that a large body of New Zealanders saw no contradiction in presenting a troupe that drew their material from 'overseas patterns' as a source of national pride.

Despite *N.Z. Truth's* criticism, the Kiwis were clearly identified as a 'New Zealand' concert party. Through their post-war career they maintained their connection with the wartime Entertainment Unit of the New Zealand Division and each return to New Zealand was presented as a 'homecoming'.³ This stands in contrast to their First World War counterparts, the Diggers, whose connection with the wartime concert party the New Zealand Pierrots diminished over the course of their post-war career. Early Australian reviews emphasized the Diggers' origin as the New Zealand Pierrots and the role of Tano Fama and Stan Lawson in forming the troupe, but in later years the company's origins with the New Zealand Division were downplayed or ignored.⁴ The company gradually become known as Pat Hanna's Diggers as he established himself as the public face of the concert party and they shifted from being a group of 'Maoriland soldiers' touring Australia, to a theatrical embodiment of a more inclusive digger culture.

¹ *N.Z. Truth*, 8 July 1953, p.4.

² *Otago Daily Times*, 18 January 1951, p.10.

³ *Souvenir of the New Zealand Kiwis Revue*, Publication, D810.E8 SOU, Auckland War Memorial Museum, (AWMM).

⁴ *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 22 June 1920, p.8; *Brisbane Courier*, 27 March 1920, p.12.

Regardless of their contrasting relationship with the nation, the bond between the WWII Kiwis and the Diggers of the First World War was recognized at the time. Early performances by the Kiwis in the Middle East were dedicated to the World War I concert parties, and on the occasion of the Kiwis' 500th performance in Melbourne the Diggers' Pat Hanna was onstage to congratulate the Kiwis' leader Terry Vaughan, recalling the Diggers' own record-breaking 480-show season in Brisbane.⁵ Yet the two groups hold quite different places in the national entertainment histories of New Zealand and Australia. Although the Kiwis' career is given significant attention in *Blue Smoke*, Chris Bourke's history of early popular music in New Zealand, there is little mention of the Diggers.⁶ In contrast, the online Australian Literature Resource database includes scripts for a number of the Diggers' sketches, but nothing on the Kiwis.⁷ Furthermore, while Pat Hanna has entries in both the New Zealand and Australian Dictionaries of Biography, Terry Vaughan goes unmentioned in the Australian version.⁸ These are not isolated examples, they are part of a wider trend; the Kiwis regularly feature in histories of entertainment in New Zealand, while the Diggers hold a more comfortable place in the Australian historiography. Taken together they illustrate how events can be distorted or marginalized when historians take the nation as their organising concept and seek out stories that suit a nationalist framework.

The concert parties' shifting relationship with the nation makes them a productive site on which to examine the nationalist narratives that have been employed to interpret this period of New Zealand history. As Deborah Montgomerie has argued, one of the central preoccupations in New Zealand general histories is the desire to work the two world wars into a linear narrative of national maturation. Within this narrative the First World War is presented as a national coming of age, while the Second World War is believed to have encouraged New Zealand to develop as a fully independent

⁵ *Revue No.1* programme, Cyril Pasco: Kiwi Concert Party, Papers, MS 2002/53, AWWM; *Souvenir of the New Zealand Kiwis Revue*.

⁶ Chris Bourke, *Blue Smoke: The Lost Dawn of New Zealand Popular Music, 1918–1964*, Auckland, 2010, pp.6, 138–44.

⁷ *Australian Literature Resource*, online, n.p., <http://www.austlit.edu.au>, accessed 5 January 2012.

⁸ Peter Downes, 'Hanna, George Patrick 1888–1973', in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, online, n.p., <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4h14/1>, accessed 7 September 2011; Mimi Colligan, 'Pat Hanna', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, online, n.p., <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090181b.htm>, accessed 21 June 2011; Peter Downes, 'Vaughan. Terrance 1915–1996', in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, online, n.p., <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/5v2/1>, accessed 07 January 2012.

state.⁹ It is this reading of the First World War, and in particular the defeat at Gallipoli, that encouraged historians such as Keith Sinclair to present the cultural nationalist movement that emerged in the 1930s as the intellectual community simply catching up with a nationalist sentiment that was developed during the Great War.¹⁰ Sinclair drew on the opinion of Ormond Burton in particular, who claimed 'when our poets caught up with [nationalist] feeling' it had already 'swept through the men who were their fathers or elder brothers' and had served during the Great War.¹¹

In spite of claims that through their service at World War I New Zealand soldiers 'discovered' their nationality, the war did not inspire a sense of nationalist recognition among all those involved.¹² The Diggers' ambivalent relationship with the nation suggests that these performers recognized their place within a trans-Tasman entertainment circuit more keenly than any nationalist connection with 'New Zealand'. Similarly, Howard Kippenberger, who served during the First World War, was a commander during the Second World War and later led the Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War publishing project, rejected any sense that the Great War spurred an emerging nationalist consciousness. When the idea for a volume on the effect of war on the nation for the 1940 Centennial surveys was pitched to Kippenberger he replied: '[m]any of us have taken part in Imperial wars and have doubtless been affected by our own experiences but the effect on the nation, if such an entity exists, of those individual experiences, appears to me to be nil'.¹³ Responses such as these have encouraged historians to reassess Sinclair's assertion that the war provoked a sense among New Zealanders that they constituted a national people.¹⁴ Michael King's claim that the belief New Zealand 'came of age' at Gallipoli was a 'necessary myth' presents a cautious reassessment of this argument; James Belich went further, arguing that the

⁹ Deborah Montgomerie, 'Anzac Anthems: New Zealand History and the Two World Wars', *University of Auckland Winter Lecture Series: Writing New Zealand History in the Twenty-First Century*, 2009, Special Collections, The University of Auckland Library; Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, Auckland, 2004, pp.299, 392, 401; W. P. Morrell, *New Zealand*, London, 1935, p.112; Keith Sinclair with Raewyn Dalziel, *A History of New Zealand*, rev edn, Auckland, 2000, pp.241, 285, 293.

¹⁰ Keith Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart: New Zealand's Search for National Identity*, Wellington, 1986, p.246.

¹¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.246.

¹² Sinclair with Dalziel, p.241.

¹³ Quoted in Chris Hilliard, 'Stories of Becoming: The Centennial Surveys and the Colonization of New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 33, 1, 1999, p.8.

¹⁴ Sinclair with Dalziel, p.241.

national war effort was led by blind Imperial loyalty with a failure to recognize distinct national interests.¹⁵

In the *New Oxford History of New Zealand* Roberto Rabel has provided an additional revision to the nationalist narrative, claiming that although the First World War did not substantially alter perceived national identities, there was a more overt 'New Zealand stamp' on the national war effort during the Second World War.¹⁶ At first glance Rabel's argument appears to fit with the experience of the New Zealand concert parties and account for the WWII Kiwis' more enduring connection with the nation. However, while Rabel largely attributed this clearer 'New Zealand stamp' to interwar cultural change, with the rise of cultural nationalism among intellectuals fostered at a popular level by the public cultural activities funded through the first Labour government, the Kiwis owed very little to nationalist projects that sought to construct an independent cultural identity.¹⁷ As the *N.Z. Truth's* criticism illustrates, the Kiwis' material was largely informed by their place within a transnational web of popular culture. If the Kiwis' closer connection with the nation owed little to the cultural nationalist projects that Rabel presents as being essential to this 'New Zealand stamp', it should encourage us to consider the potential influence of other developments in the changing role of the nation within the war effort, and to be mindful of the extent to which the distinction between the Diggers and the Kiwis has been constructed or exaggerated through practices of nationalistic history writing.

Whereas so much writing on New Zealand culture in the first half of the twentieth century has focused on the exploits of the small number of intellectuals who fit within a cultural nationalist framework, the soldier concert parties of the First and Second World Wars provide an opportunity to examine popular entertainment that was produced by New Zealanders, but was explicitly informed by transnational webs of culture.¹⁸ Through their borrowing and reinterpretation of popular songs and sketches,

¹⁵ Belich's argument has come in for criticism from Roberto Rabel, among others. Rabel claimed that Belich privileged a retrospective notion of independence and overlooked the extent to which New Zealand interests were tied to Britain. Roberto Rabel 'New Zealand's Wars', in Giselle Byrnes, ed., *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, South Melbourne, 2009, p.251; James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000*, Auckland, 2001, p.113; King, p.299.

¹⁶ Rabel, pp.251, 258.

¹⁷ *ibid.* p.258.

¹⁸ Lawrence Jones, *Picking up the Traces: The Making of a New Zealand Literary Culture, 1932-1945*, Wellington, 2003; Stuart Murray, *Never a Soul at Home: New Zealand Literary Nationalism and the 1930s*,

concert party performers illustrate the symbiotic relationship between cultural consumption and production. In addition, their success in Australia reminds us that these troupes were contributing to and shaping a wider entertainment culture. Viewing entertainment by New Zealanders within a transnational framework complicates linear narratives that fix cultural production within a story of national maturation. Instead it reveals the greater degree of fluidity and potential for ongoing change as performers responded to the new styles and fashions that emerged or faded away.

The concert parties of both wars highlight some of the continuities in nationalist sentiment throughout the early twentieth century, as performers sought to adapt cultural practices to the local setting through the sometimes superficial use of established motifs and symbols that were accepted as representative of New Zealand. Chris Hilliard's work on the 'bookmen' who dominated New Zealand cultural life before the rise of an intellectual nationalist tradition in the 1930s showcased a group of New Zealand writers who sought to adapt inherited literary frameworks to their local environment, just as the 'Maoriland' writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had done before them.¹⁹ Both groups of writers localized their writing by drawing on established marks of distinctiveness, such as indigenous fauna and flora and their perception of Maori culture. As Hilliard argued, these efforts to integrate the indigenous into Pakeha cultural property mark this writing a part of a wider process of 'cultural colonization' as settlers sought to take cultural possession of New Zealand.²⁰ Moreover, as Stuart Murray has illustrated, recognizing the New Zealand literary nationalists' place within the global cultural and political climate of the 1930s and 1940s challenges the notion of an 'hermetically sealed national literature in New Zealand'.²¹ From this perspective the concert party performances operate within a long tradition of cultural production within New Zealand that actively engaged with the new cultural innovations and tastes of the time.

Peter Gibbons may have critiqued what he saw as New Zealand's culturally unimaginative reaction to the First World War, but recent years have seen a more

Wellington, 1998; Francis Pound, *The Invention of New Zealand: Art & National Identity, 1930–1970*, Auckland, 2009.

¹⁹ Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature, 1872–1914*, Wellington, 2006, p.270.

²⁰ Chris Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion: Cultural Life in New Zealand, 1920–1950*, Auckland, 2006, p.49.

²¹ Murray, p.40.

considered approach to understanding the responses to the Great War in New Zealand. In his examination of the Anzac Day commemorations, war memorials and written remembrances that were inspired by the First World War, Scott Worthy charted the formation of remembrance traditions and challenged the popular connection between the Great War and nationalism, arguing that 'modern bulwarks such as the Anzac myth were only one of many alternative views about how best to commemorate the war'.²² Instead Worthy highlighted the shifting and multiple ways in which the First World War was memorialized by different individuals and communities of remembrance.²³ Worthy's work followed a wider scholarship on remembrance, illustrating the specificity of remembrance and collective memory, rather than relying on reductive notions of a unitary national response. While traditions and practices could be shared and replicated in different spaces, there was no single response to the war. As Jay Winter has reminded us, '[n]ations do not remember; groups of people do'.²⁴

Helen Robinson has followed on from Worthy's work, examining some of the remembrance practices that developed after the Second World War. Robinson highlighted the sharp decline in attendance at Anzac Day services immediately after the Second World War and the transition of Armistice Day to Remembrance Sunday, before that day fell into obscurity.²⁵ Like Worthy, Robinson examined forms of remembrance that are visible today and revealed their historical contingency. However, through this approach, more ephemeral but no less significant forms of remembrance are largely ignored. Robinson presented the slump in Anzac Day ceremony attendance and collapse of Armistice Day as part of a general decline in war remembrance following the Second World War; yet the popularity of the Kiwi Concert Party suggests the New Zealand and Australian public responded enthusiastically to other remembrance practices. More ephemeral forms of remembrance, such as concert parties, may not play a prominent part in how the wars are remembered today, but they can provide valuable insights into how some groups of New Zealanders responded to the conflict. Not all soldiers wanted to see their war experience carved in stone or commemorated in a national ceremony.

²² Scott Richard Worthy, 'Communities of Remembrance: The Memory of the Great War in New Zealand 1915–1939', MA thesis, University of Auckland, 2001, p.3.

²³ *ibid.*, p.145.

²⁴ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven, 2006, p.198.

²⁵ Helen Robinson, 'Lest We Forget? The Fading of New Zealand War Commemorations, 1946–1966', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 44, 1, 2010, pp.76–91.

The concert party performances provided the performers and returned soldiers in the audience with an opportunity to hold onto some of their happier memories of wars, but also share this experience with a wider body of New Zealanders who experienced the war from the home front.

Considering the concert parties of the Great War alongside their successors from the Second World War offers an opportunity to examine the nature of cultural change in the interwar years. While at first glance the WWII Kiwi Concert Party's more enduring connection with the nation may appear to support a narrative of emerging nationalist consciousness, a closer examination complicates this picture. In their tours following the war, the concert parties of both world wars gave audiences an opportunity to remember the services of their soldiers during the war, but did so in a way that reflected their place within a transnational, modern consumer culture. The *N.Z. Truth* reporter may have been disappointed in the lack of material that could be recognized as distinctly New Zealand, but the nation was just one of the collective identities evoked by the Kiwis. Like their Great War counterparts, in the Kiwis' routines 'New Zealand' existed as a subject alongside the Anzac, the empire, Britain and a wider culture of popular entertainment. An awareness of these shows, which were connected to a transnational entertainment culture, as well as a consideration of the responses of those who attended them, can provide some insight into the kinds of identities and activities that feature prominently in our past, but have been obscured by nationalist projects too concerned with presenting New Zealand as having a distinctive or exceptional national culture.



The New Zealand concert parties that were established during the First World War operated within a transnational community of soldiers within the Allied forces, who had set about forming concert parties to represent their own divisions or brigades.²⁶ These concert parties developed into an informal network in which performers drew ideas and material from seeing one another perform. Dissemination of the idea was rarely straightforward. George Lyttleton, who played viola with the Kiwis, remembered being

²⁶ J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914–1918*, Oxford, 1991, p.95.

inspired by the Follies of the 4th Division, while the Kiwis' tenor, Ernest McKinlay, claimed that it was after seeing the Bow Bells of the 56th Division that Major-General Andrew Russell decided that the New Zealand Division should have a concert party of its own.²⁷ Regardless, by 1917 every division and most brigades had their own concert party.²⁸

Concert parties were primarily set up for soldiers to entertain troops from their own division, but performers also enjoyed gauging the response from other divisions, and soldiers generally appreciated any opportunity to see new entertainment. The Kiwis' Ernest McKinlay proudly boasted that 'Tommies and Aussies would walk miles to see our performances'.²⁹ While there was a friendly rivalry between troupes, McKinlay was supportive of the other New Zealand concert parties, hailing the Tuis as the 'wing-forwards' of the 'Digger concert world' and commending their ability to set up quickly and perform close to the front line.³⁰ Concert parties such as the Kiwis and the New Zealand Pierrots also proved themselves to be popular with war-weary civilian audiences. Despite McKinlay's claim that the troupe's sole ambition was to provide amusement and relief for the soldiers, he valued the opportunity to perform before the general public.³¹ The popularity of soldier concert parties among the civilian public partly stemmed from the high demand for live entertainment during the war, but also from a desire to support those who had been performing for soldiers in frequently treacherous conditions.³² When the New Zealand Pierrots performed their revue for the English public they reminded the audience of their service for soldiers, hoping 'that they may receive as kind a reception from their hands as they have continually done from the boys in France'.³³

While the New Zealand concert parties operated within a network of like-minded performers, the performers sought to distinguish their show by including references

²⁷ George Clyne Lyttleton, 'Pierrots in Picardy: a khaki chronicle, by one of them', Unpublished Manuscript, p.28, MS242, AWMM; Ernest McKinlay, *Ways and by-Ways of a Singing Kiwi: With the N.Z. Divisional Entertainers in France*, Dunedin, 1939, p.47. Lyttleton's name is spelt differently to the frequently misspelt New Zealand town Lyttelton.

²⁸ Fuller, p.96.

²⁹ McKinlay, p.91.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.107.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.92.

³² Jean-Yves La Naour, 'Laughter and Tears in the Great War: The Need for Laughter/the Guilt of Humour', *Journal of European Studies*, 31, 123, 2001, p.267.

³³ *Eyes Front* programme, Poetry and war ephemera, MS 2008/49, AWMM.

related to their division or home. Among the New Zealand concert parties, names such as the Kiwis and the Tuis gave the troupes some distinctive 'local colour' and connected them with the natural world of New Zealand. Names that drew on indigenous features from a concert party's home nation were common among other concert parties too; the Australian troupes included the Kookaburras, the Wombats and the Kangaroo Konzert Kompany, and from Canada there were the Maple Leaves.³⁴ According to Peter Gibbons, Pakeha New Zealanders' desire to assert their connection with the natural world, which is evident in this naming practice, operated within a wider process of 'cultural colonization' as the settler society sought to take cultural control over the colonized land.³⁵ Considering the prominent place the First World War takes in texts that construct a narrative of national identity in New Zealand, Australia and Canada, alongside Gibbons' claim that such assertions of national identity should be seen as part of an ongoing colonial project, these kinds of naming practices are clearly significant. However, while these examples fit Gibbons' framework, it is important not to ignore the many others, such as the New Zealand Pierrots, that do not. The Canadian Dumbells were named after the red dumbbell on the Third Division emblem; the Gunners of the New Zealand artillery also took their name from their war experience, rather than a national or colonial agenda.³⁶ The Australian troupe the Anzac Coves connected these two threads together in a way that reflected both their war experience and their home nation, even if they may have forgotten what the 'nz' in Anzac stands for.³⁷

In the performances themselves, however, material that explicitly referred to New Zealand is more difficult to uncover. The Kiwis' first production was a pantomime; following the genre's conventions they based their show on a well known story, in their case the tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, but adapted the show to suit the specifics of their performance. Their title, *Achi Baba and the More or Less Forty Thieves*, referenced the main position of the Turkish defence during the Gallipoli campaign, yet the material was largely borrowed from Oscar Asche's popular interpretation of the Ali

³⁴ Concert and Theatre Programs Collection, First World War, Souvenirs 2, Series 4: Concerts given by military units, Australian War Memorial Archive, Canberra (AWMA); John Jason Collins Wilson, 'Soldiers of Song: The Dumbells and Other Canadian Concert Parties of the First World War', MA Thesis, University of Guelph, 2003, p.143.

³⁵ Peter Gibbons, 'Cultural Colonization and National Identity', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 36, 1, 2002, pp.10–12.

³⁶ It is unclear if there was a reason for the incorrect spelling of 'dumbbell' in the Dumbells' name.

³⁷ Concert and Theatre Programs Collection, AWMA; Wilson, p.143.

Baba story, *Chu Chin Chow*, a hit on the London stage.³⁸ The Kiwis were even fortunate enough to get the costumes from the London company when Asche redressed the cast.³⁹ For the Kiwis' second main production they traded their pierrot costumes for dress clothes to suit a smarter revue show. This revue, *Y Go Crook*, was named after an expression which one reviewer described as 'New Zealandese' for 'Pourquoi s'en faire' or 'why bother'.⁴⁰ Again the revue drew heavily from current London shows. Their use of material from one show, *Maid of the Mountains*, was so extensive that after the Kiwis' public show in Paris the Performing Rights Association made a successful court claim against the Kiwis for the unlawful use of songs from the London show.⁴¹



Figure 2.1: The WWI Kiwis with their orchestra. Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association: New Zealand official negatives, World War 1914-1918, 1/2-012914-G, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington (ATL).

³⁸ McKinlay, p.83

³⁹ *Evening Post* (Wellington), 13 April 1918, p.13.

⁴⁰ McKinlay, p.111.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.103.

The Kiwis' name may have highlighted their status as the primary concert party within the New Zealand Division, but their material reveals that, like the other soldier concert parties, it was their connection with the musical comedies popular in London that had the greater influence on their content. However, alongside the army references that made their way into most soldier concert parties, the names of their two main productions suggests there were opportunities to include material that reflected their position as part of the New Zealand Division. Unfortunately, in the absence of any scripts or recordings of their wartime performances it is impossible to know for sure how the Kiwis interpreted their material; yet, their adaptation of tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves to reflect an aspect of the Gallipoli campaign gives a broad indication of the ways in which performers could re-interpret material to speak more directly to their intended audience.

Overt references to New Zealand were more apparent in the New Zealand Pierrots' routines. Their revue *Eyes Front* tracked a soldier's journey from Wellington to Europe and the show's programme cover was packed with visual references to New Zealand (see figure 2.2).⁴² Like the other concert parties, however, the New Zealand Pierrots relied primarily on the well worn soldiers' tales, scenes from popular variety shows and songs that were common among most soldier concert parties.⁴³ Before joining the Kiwis, George Lyttleton performed impromptu shows with Tano Fama and Stan Lawson as they were forming the New Zealand Pierrots. Lyttleton claimed they got most of their material from concert party songbooks and adapted them to inject their own sense of humour, something he claimed was a common practice among concert parties.⁴⁴ However, the Pierrots gradually included songs that spoke more directly to their place within the New Zealand Division. During a tour of Europe and the United Kingdom while New Zealand soldiers were awaiting demobilisation, their performance included the song 'Kuamate' and opened with the company singing 'Take Me Back to New Zealand'.⁴⁵

⁴² *Eyes Front* programme.

⁴³ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 20 October 1919, p.2.

⁴⁴ Lyttleton, p.35.

⁴⁵ Diggers Concert Party programme, 8 April 1919, The Fama-Bolton collection, fMS-Papers-6286, ATL.



Figure 2.2: Programme cover for the New Zealand Pierrots' revue 'Eyes Front'. Poetry and War Ephemera, MS 2008/49, Auckland War Memorial Museum (AWMM).

'Kuamata' was promoted as a 'Maori song' and this effort to draw on the perceived distinctiveness of 'Maori culture' has clear links with the names that tied the performers to New Zealand's natural world. As Marianne Schultz has demonstrated, through productions such as Alfred Hill's opera *Hinemoa* Maori culture had been integrated into Western theatrical forms from the late nineteenth century onwards as part of a process that she argued saw romantic representations of Maori culture, and in particular haka, 'woven into the growing framework of national identity'.⁴⁶ The distinctiveness of 'the Maori', like New Zealand's indigenous fauna, recalled a picturesque image of New Zealand that is likely to have appealed to both homesick New Zealand soldiers and wider audiences who appreciated European depictions of what were seen as exotic cultures. However, although these songs stand out to anyone

⁴⁶ Marianne Schultz, "'Sons of the Empire': Dance and the New Zealand Male", *Dance Research*, 29, 1, 2011, p.31.

seeking to establish the troupe's connection with the nation, they were not an integral part of the New Zealand Pierrots' routines.

For New Zealand concert parties such as the Kiwis and the New Zealand Pierrots their connection with the New Zealand Division sat comfortably alongside their identities as soldiers and consumers of popular culture. References to New Zealand intersected with appropriations from the London variety shows and songs and sketches that were common among international soldier concert parties. Ironically, the Kiwis' and the New Zealand Pierrots' attempts to work some local colour into their routines could itself be read as further evidence of this transnational connection, since they did so by following established conventions that were common among soldier concert parties. National symbols and motifs are there to be found, but they do not necessarily reflect an emerging national consciousness. Certainly, they were not always recognized by the performers themselves. When the Kiwis had their pierrot costumes made they included 'a white fern in a black circle'. While New Zealanders today may recognize this as a national icon, McKinlay simply saw it as the sign for the New Zealand Division.⁴⁷ This distinction between nation and division may appear slight, but it provides some insight into the collective identities that can be suppressed or misread through accounts that stress the place of the war within a reductive nationalist narrative.



Partly due to Pat Hanna's intervention, the New Zealand Pierrots remained together throughout the process of demobilisation. Hanna had been made New Zealand's entertainment and recreation officer during the occupation of Germany in an effort to prevent boredom and frustration among the troops stationed in Cologne.⁴⁸ A keen sportsman, he organized an athletics programme for soldiers and developed a game, batinton, to be played by soldiers at rest.⁴⁹ In addition to this Hanna also set out to form a concert party, having seen performers from the Kiwis putting on shows in and around

⁴⁷ McKinlay, p.57.

⁴⁸ G.D. Bolton, *Warrior Entertainers: The Story of the 'Digger Pierrots' of the New Zealand Army in World War I*, Sydney, 1997, p.6.

⁴⁹ Batinton resembled badminton but was played with a cork bat, a hard shuttlecock and could accommodate up to 48 players at a time. The game suited Hanna's need to amuse a large number of soldiers with limited space and funds. The game was revived during World War Two before drifting into obscurity. Clay Djubal, 'Pat Hanna', *Australian Literature Resource*, online, n.p., <http://austlit.edu.au/run?ex=ShowAgent&agentId=A9BB>, accessed 10 June 2011.

Cologne.⁵⁰ Almost all the members of the New Zealand Pierrots were still together in Cologne and Hanna took this opportunity to reform them under his leadership as the Diggers. After putting on shows at camps in Germany, they toured Europe, performing in Paris and Rouen before returning to Britain. In Britain shows in Glasgow and Edinburgh were followed by a successful, if brief, season at the Aldwych theatre in London.⁵¹ Hanna was credited as being in charge of the troupe, but the revue was still produced under the supervision of Tano Fama with Ivor Weir as musical director and Stan Lawson directing the dances and ensembles.⁵²

After news of the Diggers' popularity reached New Zealand plans were laid for a New Zealand tour.⁵³ Billed as the Digger Pierrots, they drew on their success in Europe and their role during the war to assure the public that this was a high quality performance they could support.⁵⁴ The *Poverty Bay Herald* claimed that '[m]emories of what the "Diggers" have done in cheering up the men in the trenches would entitle them to a crowded house, but on merits alone they should, wherever they go, command the big audiences that have greeted them in all the main centres'.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the knowledge that the profits would go towards the Returned Soldiers' Fund ensured this was seen as a venture worthy of public support.⁵⁶ The Diggers' tour of New Zealand raised £3000 for the fund, before they left New Zealand in March 1920 to take on the Australian market.⁵⁷

Just as the wartime concert parties were part of a community of like-minded troupes, the Diggers were one of a number of concert parties touring New Zealand in the immediate aftermath of the Great War. The Te Koas were formed from soldiers who had performed during the war; between August and December 1919 they toured many of New Zealand's main centres.⁵⁸ Late in 1919, encouraged by the success of the

⁵⁰ McKinlay, p.122; Peter Downes, *Top of the Bill: Entertainers through the Years*, Wellington, 1979, p.58.

⁵¹ *Poverty Bay Herald*, 20 June 1919, p.9; Downes, *Top of the Bill*, p.57.

⁵² Diggers Concert Party Programme, Edinburgh 8 April 1919, The Fama-Bolton collection, fMS-Papers-6286, ATL.

⁵³ *Grey River Argus*, 8 July 1919, p.4.

⁵⁴ *Auckland Star*, 12 July 1919, p.3; *Ashburton Guardian*, 8 August 1919, p.3.

⁵⁵ *Poverty Bay Herald*, 26 September 1919, p.3.

⁵⁶ *Auckland Star*, 15 July 1919, p.6; *Ashburton Guardian*, 11 August 1919, p.7.

⁵⁷ Miscellaneous - NZEF (New Zealand Expeditionary Force) Diggers concert party - Correspondence, AD 1 1045/65/233, Archives NZ, Wellington (ANZ); Downes, 'Hanna, George Patrick'.

⁵⁸ *Poverty Bay Herald*, 14 August 1919, p.3; *Wanganui Chronicle*, 3 September 1919, p.8; *Colonist* (Nelson), 21 November 1919, p.7; *Ashburton Guardian*, 12 December 1919, p.7.

Diggers' tour, another group of returned soldiers formed a concert party and embarked on a national tour to raise money for the Patriotic Association to assist widows and orphans of the deceased.⁵⁹ The troupe named themselves the Kiwis, but did not include members from the concert party that had served during the war. Although both the Kiwis and the Te Koas were made up of returned soldiers, the Diggers were the only wartime concert party to return to New Zealand intact, even if they had changed their name.⁶⁰ Neither the Kiwis nor the Te Koas achieved the same level of success as the Diggers, but they contributed to an environment in which returned soldiers performing as a collective concert party was a familiar sight.

Overseas similar companies made up of returned soldiers performed to civilian audiences to great acclaim, with the Dumbells in Canada and the Splinters in Britain developing particularly successful careers.⁶¹ In a similar fashion, a number of Australian concert parties, such as the Smart Set Diggers and the All Diggers Company, were formed to entertain Australian crowds.⁶² It was within this context that Pat Hanna and the Diggers sought to make their mark. In April 1920 the *Bulletin* claimed that it was due to the success of the All Diggers Company that J.C. Williamson brought the (New Zealand) Diggers to Australia.⁶³ Still billed as the Digger Pierrots, early Australian reviews emphasized their origin with the New Zealand Division and the role of Tano Fama and Stan Lawson in forming the troupe.⁶⁴ The *Sydney Morning Herald* commented on both the large number of New Zealanders in the audience and the inclusion of 'Maori songs and hakas' in the performance.⁶⁵ In later years, however, this connection with New Zealand was downplayed or ignored. Hanna established himself as the public face of the concert party, as they shifted from being a group of New Zealand soldiers touring Australia, to the most prominent of the 'digger' troupes touring Australasia. The name of the troupe also changed over time, going from being the Digger Pierrots, to the Famous Diggers, before being known as Pat Hanna's Famous Diggers.

⁵⁹ Miscellaneous - Kiwi Concert Party NZEF (New Zealand Expeditionary Force) correspondence, AD 1 1045/65/233/1, ANZ; *Poverty Bay Herald*, 22 March 1920, p.5.

⁶⁰ *Auckland Star*, 15 July 1919, p.6.

⁶¹ Wilson, p.131; Roger Baker, *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts*, New York, 1994, p.189.

⁶² Richard Fotheringham, 'Laughing It Off: Australian Stage Comedy after World War I', *History Australia*, 7, 1, 2010, p.4; Bolton, p.8.

⁶³ *Bulletin* (Sydney), 13 April 1920, p.42.

⁶⁴ *Advertiser*, 22 June 1920, p.8; *Brisbane Courier*, 27 March 1920, p.12.

⁶⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 May 1920, p.13.

The Diggers' 1923 New Zealand tour was the last in which they were described as a specifically New Zealand concert party. For this tour Tano Fama and Stan Lawson were the company's star performers, with Fama managing and producing the show; Pat Hanna was not involved.⁶⁶ Hanna had briefly formed another concert party, the Vice Regals, who toured New Zealand in 1921 and 1922 while the Diggers were also touring the country.⁶⁷ Interestingly the New Zealand press presented the 1923 tour as the Diggers' last and the *Evening Post* and the *Truth* both took the opportunity to wistfully reflect upon their service during the war.⁶⁸ For Fama this was indeed the end of his association with the Diggers and while there is no evidence of any tension between Fama and Hanna, Fama's departure from the troupe entrenched Hanna's position as the figurehead of the company. He led the Diggers during all of their subsequent tours of New Zealand.⁶⁹ Stan Lawson remained with Hanna's troupe on their return to Australia, but the Diggers' connection with the New Zealand Pierrots that had performed during the war was no longer mentioned in promotional material or in reviews.

The Diggers' shift from being a 'New Zealand concert party' to a more inclusive 'Australasian' one, and the gradual removal of material that focused exclusively on New Zealand, appears to have been largely unproblematic. Songs such as 'Take Me Back to New Zealand' may have been regular features of their initial tours, but reviews rarely commented on them.⁷⁰ A reporter for the *Grey River Argus* may have appreciated 'I've Lost my Heart in Maoriland' and claimed 'the local setting add[ed] to the spirit of the song', but such observations were rare, and in this instance praise was no more pronounced than it had been for other material such as 'Dear Little Shamrock' and 'Ragging Thro' the Rye'.⁷¹ Aspects of the Diggers' revue that had a specific New Zealand focus were retained for their 1920 tour of Australia and mentioned in some reviews, but were phased out for subsequent tours of both New Zealand and Australia.⁷² Moreover, it is not always clear what would have been identified as 'New Zealand material'. New Zealand audiences may have seen 'I've Lost my Heart in Maoriland' as local colour, as

⁶⁶ *Hawera & Normanby Star*, 27 June 1923, p.8.

⁶⁷ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 15 August 1921, p.2; *N.Z. Truth*, 24 June 1922, p.1; Theatre ephemera and programmes for music-hall, comedy and variety productions in New Zealand, in 1922, Eph-A-VARIETY-1922, ATL.

⁶⁸ *Evening Post*, 4 July 1923, p.6; *N.Z. Truth*, 14 July 1923, p.15.

⁶⁹ Tano Fama, d 1940, Correspondence and newspaper clippings, 91–319, ATL.

⁷⁰ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 29 October 1919, p.2.

⁷¹ *Grey River Argus*, 24 February 1920, p.5.

⁷² *Bulletin*, 29 April 1920, p.34; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 May 1920, p.13; *Advertiser*, 22 June 1920, p.8.

might historians looking for expression of a nationalist sentiment, but Australian audiences were more likely to have recognized the song from the local revue 'Buzz Buzz' or from Gertrude Lawrence's popular rendition.⁷³ By the time of the Diggers' final tour in 1929, the troupe's initial connection with the New Zealand Pierrots was no longer mentioned, but the performers still retained their connection with the war as they hosted a special 'Diggers Night' for returned soldiers.⁷⁴

From their first Australian tour onwards the membership of the Diggers changed dramatically as new performers were brought in and replaced many of those from the days of the New Zealand Pierrots.⁷⁵ From 1921 the troupe also included women, distinguishing the Diggers from the all-male companies touring Australia.⁷⁶ One of the most prominent new male performers was Joe Valli, with whom Hanna developed the onstage partnership of Chic and Joe.⁷⁷ This comic duo became a common feature of revues with sketches that sought to find humour in both the war environment and post-war society.⁷⁸ Richard Fotheringham claimed that Hanna's 'Chic', 'a lanky, laconic, often sentimental and usually inebriated Anzac', made a significant contribution to the iconography of the 'typical digger'.⁷⁹ However Fotheringham suggested that perhaps Hanna's greatest legacy was the image of himself that graced newspaper adverts and billboards and banners outside theatres as the Diggers were touring.⁸⁰ As an aside Fotheringham pointed out that in this image Hanna's slouch hat was worn in the New Zealand, rather than Australian, style, without the side turned up (see figure 2.4). However, early promotions pictured Hanna wearing a campaign, or 'lemon squeezer' hat, a style which over the course of the First World War became one of the most identifiable elements of the New Zealand Army (see figure 2.3).⁸¹ The movement away

⁷³ Downes, *Top of the Bill*, p.59.

⁷⁴ *Evening Post*, 9 July 1929, p.5.

⁷⁵ Downes, *Top of the Bill*, p.59.

⁷⁶ Djubal, 'Pat Hanna'.

⁷⁷ The Chic and Joe partnership was formed in 1923 after Will Crawford, who had been performing as 'Bert' in a similar comic duo with Hanna, left the troupe. Richard Fotheringham and Clay Djubal, 'Chic and Joe', *Australian Literature Resource*, online, n.p., <http://austlit.edu.au/run?ex=ShowAgent&agentId=A9{o>, accessed 12 June 2011; *Evening Post*, 8 July 1929, p.5.

⁷⁷ 'Demobilisation', *Australian Literature Resource*, online, n.p., <http://www.austlit.edu.au/run?ex=ShowWork&workId=C%23FjE>, accessed 12 June 2011.

⁷⁸ Fotheringham and Djubal, 'Chic and Joe'; *Evening Post*, 8 July 1929, p.5.

⁷⁹ Fotheringham, p.4.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.5.

⁸¹ Early dress regulations for the New Zealand military did include a slouch hat; the left side of the brim was to be folded up and held in place with a regimental badge and a leather strap. But after 1915 slouch

from the distinctively New Zealand campaign hat could be seen as part of the reconfiguration of the concert party to represent a trans-Tasman military culture. However, the slouch hat is also less identifiably militaristic than the campaign hat; looking at the later picture it is not immediately clear whether or not he is in uniform. This shift illustrates the difficulty in distinguishing the Diggers' connection with New Zealand from their initial place within the New Zealand Division and the extent to which their initial status as a distinctly 'New Zealand' concert party was tied to the memory of the troupe's service during the war.



Figure 2.3: *Register* (Adelaide), 18 June 1920, p.2.



Figure 2.4 *Brisbane Courier*, 20 May 1926, p.2.

In the early 1930s Hanna moved into the burgeoning film industry making three films — *Diggers*, *Diggers in Blighty* and *Waltzing Matilda* — all of which drew on material from the Diggers' stage career and screened as the stage show was still being performed.⁸² He also released gramophone recordings of comedy monologues from the Diggers' shows, with 'The Gospel According to Cricket' and 'Mademoiselle from

hats had a flat brim with a regimental badge worn on the front. Barry O'Sullivan and Matthew O'Sullivan, *New Zealand Army Uniforms and Clothing, 1910–1945*, Christchurch, 2009, pp.147–52.

⁸² Downes, *Top of the Bill*, p.60.

Armentieres' being particularly popular.⁸³ While Hanna has been retrospectively heralded as an archetypal 'digger', he holds an ambivalent place between the parallel Anzac legacies of New Zealand and Australia. To some extent the Diggers recall a shared Anzac culture, which has been obscured as historians work accounts from the war into reductive nationalist narratives; however, in other ways they were part of a wider transnational entertainment culture that was simply performed to a trans-Tasman audience. In his own life Hanna maintained connections with a number of collective identities. During the Second World War he was involved with the Australian military and resumed his promotion of batinton, the game he had developed for New Zealand soldiers during the Great War. He continued to promote the game in New Zealand and Australia after the war, before settling in England where he opened a factory devoted to producing batinton equipment.⁸⁴ Hanna's final years were spent researching his Scottish genealogy and devoted to his successful effort to secure the Hannay clan's ownership of its ruined ancestral home, Sorbie Castle.⁸⁵ Hanna's own life illustrates the significance of these relationships with soldiers, performers and family that operate both within and beyond the borders of the nation; such relationships are lost if his life is made to fit only within a nationalist narrative.



When the New Zealand military revived the concert party tradition during the Second World War the concert parties of the First World War were presented as the forbearers of a national tradition, rather than part of a transnational network of like-minded troupes.⁸⁶ However, unlike the First World War concert parties, the Kiwi Concert Party was its own military unit, the New Zealand Entertainment Unit, and received greater financial support from the National Patriotic Fund Board than their Great War counterparts had enjoyed.⁸⁷ Terry Vaughan, the Kiwis' producer and director for most of their career, claimed that the Kiwis' status as a military unit and their ability to entertain troops in the field and close to the front line made them unique in the Second

⁸³ Djubal, 'Pat Hanna'.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Downes, 'Hanna, George Patrick'; Colligan, 'Pat Hanna'.

⁸⁶ *Revue No. 1* Programme; Concert Completion Certificates 1941–1943, MS Papers 6522-3, ATL.

⁸⁷ Downes, p.77.

World War.⁸⁸ In many respects he was right. Although the Australian Army Amenities Service organized similar concert parties to tour the Pacific, by the end of the war the Kiwis were one of the few allied troupes operating in the style of an all-male soldier concert party of the First World War.

Whereas the New Zealand military looked back to the First World War for lessons on providing entertainment for soldiers, the British army drew on the stars from London's West End and other professional entertainers. The British Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) was formed in 1939 by Basil Dean who believed that some form of professional entertainment was necessary to maintain soldiers' morale.⁸⁹ The ENSA professionals frequently performed for New Zealand troops and the Kiwis recognized that their routine would have to be of a high standard to compete and justify their full time status. Particular attention was paid to work behind the scenes. As original director Tom Kirk-Burnnand claimed, for a show without recognisable stars 'the smaller details require the greatest attention'.⁹⁰ He had seen ENSA companies get away with sloppy stage management due to the quality of the actors and the appeal of women onstage, but felt that audiences would not be so forgiving of the Kiwis. Kirk-Burnnand's insistence was rewarded and one of the Kiwi Concert Party's proudest claims was that their amateur performers were more popular with New Zealand soldiers than the ENSA professionals, and were also enjoyed by British soldiers.⁹¹ However, ENSA's own reputation was far from exemplary. As Richard Fawkes has argued, ENSA's experience throughout the Second World War illustrates the challenges that confronted those who sought to bring professional entertainment to the front line.⁹²

Rather than being born from a desire to produce a distinctive entertainment company, the New Zealand military's focus on a soldier concert party for the provision of live entertainment reflected the practical benefits of relying on soldier entertainers.

⁸⁸ Tony Rex, "'Kiwis': The Story of Kiwi Concert Party, October 1940 to January 1954', Unpublished Manuscript, p.98, MS 1624, AWWM; Vaughan, p.9.

⁸⁹ Richard Fawkes, *Fighting for a Laugh: Entertaining the British and American Armed Forces 1939-1946*, London, 1978, p.12.

⁹⁰ 'Kiwi Concert Party Report 26 July 1941', Cyril Pasco: Kiwi Concert Party, Papers, MS 2002/53, folder one, AWWM.

⁹¹ Vaughan, p.73; Downes, *Top of the Bill*, p.79; N.Z. Entertainment Unit: Report on Alexandra Tour, Cyril Pasco: Kiwi Concert Party, Papers, MS 2002/53, folder one, AWWM; *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* (AJHR), 1943, H-22A, p.5.

⁹² Fawkes, p.24.

While ENSA's reputation plummeted and earned the soubriquet 'Every Night Something Awful' as they stretched their resources, attempting to respond to an almost unlimited demand for entertainment, entertainment troupes that employed trained soldiers regularly received a more appreciative response. Many British divisions sought to revive the concert party tradition of the First World War; however, these troupes were usually short-lived and permanent full-time concert parties were rare.⁹³ In 1941 the Stars in Battledress organisation, officially titled Central Pool of Artists, was formed and drew on performers serving with the military who could be sent to locations too dangerous for the civilian men and women attached to ENSA.⁹⁴ Fawkes claimed soldiers were appreciative of companies such as Stars in Battledress and soldier concert parties because they were seen as fellow soldiers doing their best in the conditions. ENSA, meanwhile, was seen as 'a civilian organization living in a military world', and therefore, 'the men in uniform resented its presence'.⁹⁵

The Canadian and Australian military organisations also recognized the value of soldier-led entertainment. The CAS's marquee company, 'The Army Show', opened with a popular season in Toronto before shipping out to entertain those serving in Europe.⁹⁶ There were already small scale concert parties performing for Canadian troops stationed in Europe before the formation of the CAS, but the new organisation introduced Broadway styled shows that reflected changing tastes and the influence of big band sounds and larger productions such as Irving Berlin's 'This Is the Army'.⁹⁷ The Australian Army Amenities Service was formed almost immediately after the outbreak of the Second World War to provide entertainment for those serving in the Mediterranean and Middle East. However, the Australian military's decision in 1942 to focus predominately on the war in the Pacific meant troupes could be stationed in Australia and sent out when required. George Pomeroy, one of the performers with the Australian Army Entertainment Group, claimed their focus was on versatile companies that could get as close to the soldiers fighting as possible.⁹⁸ Initially these troupes were

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.37.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.39.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.187.

⁹⁶ Laurel Halladay, "'It Made Them Forget About the War for a Minute': Canadian Army, Navy and Air Force Entertainment Units During the Second World War", *Canadian Military History*, 11, 4, 2002, p.24.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.23.

⁹⁸ George Pomeroy interview, transcript of oral history recording, S00595, p.4, Australian War Memorial Archive, Canberra, (AWM).

all soldiers and all men, but after touring one of their 'Loan Shows' for the Australian public a number of women got involved. Pomeroy stated that while the women were popular they presented a logistical challenge as they could not be taken to certain locations and required a greater level of security and protection.⁹⁹

The success of the Kiwi Concert Party in the Middle East led to the allocation of funds to form a similar concert party to entertain soldiers serving in the Pacific. The Pacific Kiwi Concert Party was formed in April 1943 and began performing for soldiers stationed in New Caledonia, functioning as part of the Army Education and Welfare Service.¹⁰⁰ Under difficult conditions in the jungle the Pacific Kiwis were praised for the quality of their show, and their ability to reach small groups of soldiers in isolated spots.¹⁰¹ Rex Sayers, who acted as producer and manager for the troupe, was a familiar figure to some due to his experience as a radio announcer and his Repertory Society productions.¹⁰² During a four month tour from December 1943 to April 1944 the *Evening Post* reported that the Pacific Kiwis had put on 90 full performances and 20 impromptu shows to a total of 70,000 troops from New Zealand and America. In the process their instruments were reported to be 'washed up' due to the stresses from travel and performing in the open, often in rain and mud.¹⁰³ The National Patriotic Fund Board was, however, quick to recognize the value of the concert party and released funds for the purchase of new equipment. The Pacific Kiwis were supplemented by another concert party, the Tuis, who were formed by Corporal David Reid in Fiji before being moved to New Caledonia to tour all units in the Bouloupari area and in Cambridge when the division returned to New Zealand.¹⁰⁴

With ENSA shows frequently being performed for New Zealand soldiers and a paucity of recognisable professionals that could be recruited by the New Zealand military, the Kiwis were seen as an ideal way to complement the existing entertainment

⁹⁹ Pomeroy interview, p.22.

¹⁰⁰ Oliver Arthur Gillespie, *Base Wallahs: Story of the Units of Base Organisation*, Wellington, 1946, p.126; *Evening Post*, 10 April 1943, p.6.

¹⁰¹ *Ellesmere Guardian*, 7 December 1943, p.2; *Evening Post*, 1 March 1944, p.4.

¹⁰² *Evening Post*, 10 April 1943, p.6; 17 May 1943, p.3.

¹⁰³ *Evening Post*, 29 April 1944, p.9.

¹⁰⁴ New Zealand Army 3rd Division Histories Committee, *Headquarters: A Brief Outline of the Activities of Headquarters of the Third Division and the 8th and 14th Brigades During Their Service in the Pacific*, Wellington, 1947, p.64; P Series: Talk Tui Concert Party David Reed, DAT 49, Radio New Zealand Sound Archive, Christchurch (RNZSA).

for New Zealand soldiers.¹⁰⁵ While organisations such as the Tuis at the Maadi camp, made up from the Women's War Service Auxiliary, and the Mobile Cinema Unit played important roles entertaining soldiers, the Kiwis were figureheads of the New Zealand military's entertainment services. Vaughan may have stressed the perceived distinctiveness of the Kiwis, but their shows still relied on material that was popular among many other military entertainment companies as well. The Kiwis performed original work, but sketches such as 'Olga Pulovski, The Beautiful Spy', extracts from musicals or operettas like the Vagabond King, or their renditions of well known jazz numbers, formed the basis of their show and reflected their place within a transnational culture of popular entertainment.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, their official position within the military as the Entertainment Unit was part of a wider trend that saw entertainment officially integrated into the military infrastructure. ENSA's belief that professional entertainers were necessary may have contrasted with the Kiwis' use of soldier performers, but both organisations were formed in response to a greater level of attention afforded to entertainment by military officials. These WWII Kiwis may not have operated within a network of like-minded troupes as easily as their Great War counterparts had, but their formation and performances were still largely informed by their place within this larger culture of entertainment.



When the Entertainment Unit returned to New Zealand on furlough in 1943, along with many other men of the 2nd N.Z.E.F, the Kiwis were given the opportunity to present their revue to the New Zealand public. Civilians now had their chance to see the Kiwis who, as the *Evening Post* emphasized, 'had done so much for the entertainment of New Zealand Forces in the Middle East'.¹⁰⁷ The tour was organized in order to raise money for the National Patriotic Fund and saw the Kiwis put on 22 performances in 16 cities over four weeks.¹⁰⁸ Reviews remarked on the high quality of the routines and the relief it brought for those who sought the return of some 'flesh-and-blood' entertainment to New

¹⁰⁵ U Series: ENSA Concert of NZ Troops in Egypt P1-10, DAT 79, RNZSA; Downes, *Top of the Bill*, p.78.

¹⁰⁶ Rex, pp.10-11.

¹⁰⁷ *Evening Post*, 25 August 1943, p.3.

¹⁰⁸ Vaughan, p.48; Patriotic Funds - Kiwi Concert party from Egypt - Tour of New Zealand, IA 1 3109/172/348/3, ANZ.

Zealand audiences.¹⁰⁹ The Kiwis' tour was also tinged with nostalgia, drawing as it did on memories from the earlier war. The *Dominion* remarked that '[j]ust as the men of the Second N.Z.E.F. sustain the glorious traditions of the Anzacs of 1914-1918, so do the Kiwis ... sustain the good names of the Kiwis of the last war'.¹¹⁰ Throughout their tour the Kiwis were commended not just for the quality of their show, but for their service to the New Zealand forces.¹¹¹ In this way the tour played a significant role in legitimising the Kiwis, by connecting them with a lineage of concert parties and emphasizing their importance to the war effort.

For their domestic tour the Kiwis brought together material from their previous tours, repackaged as *Kiwi Revue No. 8*. Onstage the female impersonators Phil Jay and Wally Pictor were the undisputed stars. Their routine as the 'Can Can Girls from the Folies Bergeres' and Jay's turn as 'Olga Pulovsky, The Beautiful Spy' were staples in soldier shows and maintained their status as audience favourites.¹¹² The Kiwis' band also received particular praise. The *Evening Post* identified it as the 'centrepiece of the unit' and claimed it possessed a 'versatility of talent that is astonishing'.¹¹³ The Kiwis opened part two of their revue with the orchestra up front as a stage band. There they performed a Count Basie series, 'Doggin' Around', a collection of Mozart pieces, and the William Tell overture, with Vaughan performing as 'Leopold Popoffsky/Popowski', a parody of the well known conductor Leopold Stokowski. The *Dominion* claimed that 'in their dressy white tunics ... they fairly swept the audience off its aggregate feet'.¹¹⁴

The entertainment organisations for the British, Canadian and Australian war efforts were established in their home countries, and were therefore able to perform regularly for the general public. The Kiwis' tour, however, was a one off and could only have occurred within the context of a wider furlough. It familiarized many New Zealanders with the troupe and ensured the public maintained an active interest in them once they returned to war. For many of the Kiwis, however, the furlough tour marked the end of their involvement in the concert party. They were among the

¹⁰⁹ Maurice Hurst, *Music and the Stage in New Zealand: A Century of Entertainment, 1840-1943*, Auckland, 1944, p.88.

¹¹⁰ *Dominion* (Wellington), 8 October 1943, p.3.

¹¹¹ *Evening Post*, 25 August 1943, p.3; 7 October 1943, p.8.

¹¹² *Press* (Christchurch), 28 September 1943, p.2; *Otago Daily Times*, 2 October 1943, p.6; *Dominion*, 8 October 1943, p.3.

¹¹³ *Evening Post*, 8 October, p.3.

¹¹⁴ *Dominion*, 8 October 1943, p.3.

hundreds of men who were declared medically unfit to return to Europe.¹¹⁵ Therefore, when the Entertainment Unit returned to Maadi camp Vaughan set about recruiting new members for a revised company.¹¹⁶ The Kiwis' band was bolstered by the recruitment of a number of the country's top jazz musicians. Among them were the three Campbell brothers; Phil, George and Lew. Phil, who had been New Zealand's star trumpeter before the war, was tragically killed during his tour with the Kiwis when a German shell hit a building they were set to perform in.¹¹⁷

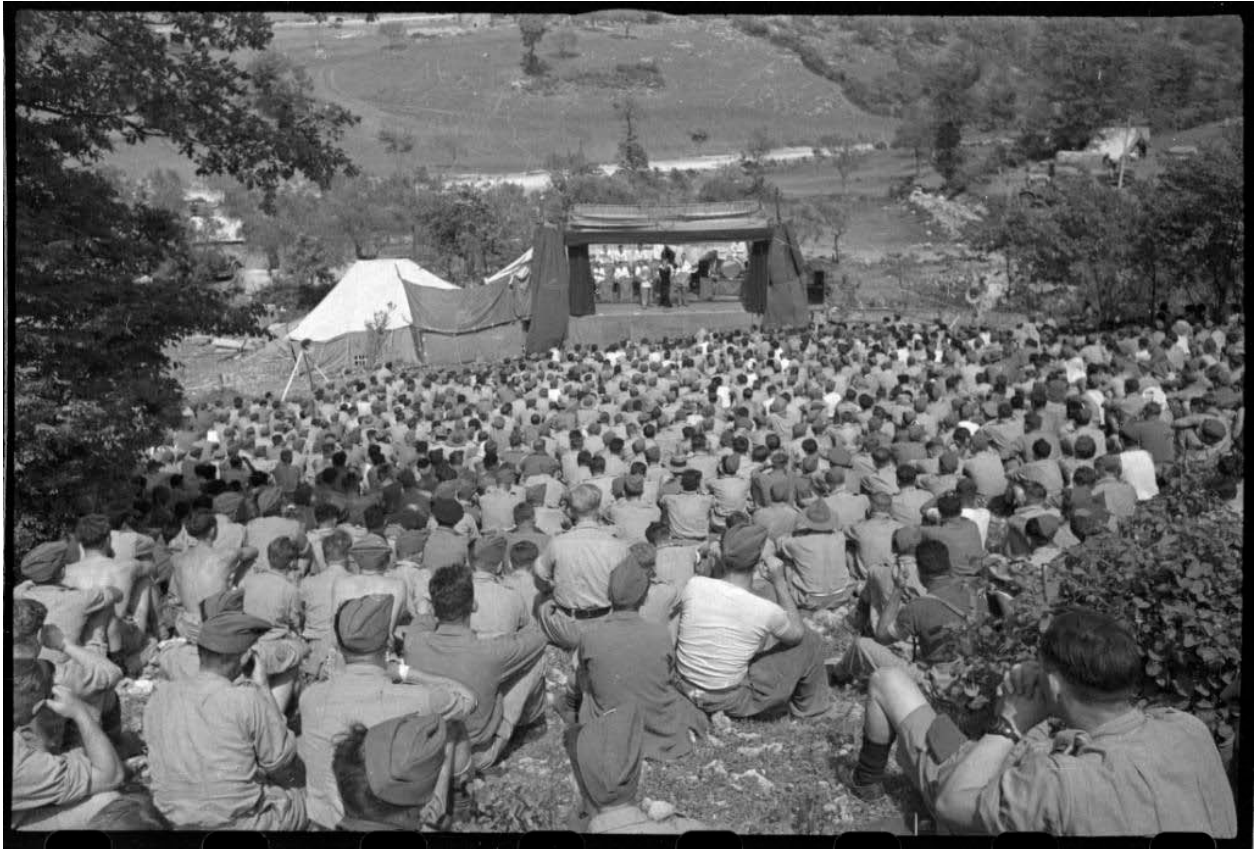


Figure 2.5: New Zealand troops watching the Kiwi Concert Party's first concert in Italy, Volturno Valley, Italy, 12 May 1944, DA-05776-F, ATL.

It was not long after the official Entertainment Unit returned to Europe that those left behind formed the Kiwi Concert Party Entertainments Ltd and performed for the New Zealand public as the Kiwis. This new professional variety company included a

¹¹⁵ T. Duncan M. Stout, *War Surgery and Medicine*, Wellington, 1954, p.647.

¹¹⁶ Vaughan, p.57. The spelling of the name of Vaughan's 'mad conductor' role was inconsistent, but most common was 'Popoffsky'.

¹¹⁷ Bourke, p.142.

number of performers from the Entertainment Unit such as Jim Millins, who acted as stage manager, and orchestra director George Hatton.¹¹⁸ Other performers from the wartime Kiwis included Phil Jay, Tim Bonner, Morris Double, Taffy Owen, and John Reidy. K.C.P. Entertainments used the same format as the Entertainment Unit and much of the same material, including their traditional opening number 'A Song to Start the Show'.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, they drew on the prestige of the Kiwi Concert Party performing in the Middle East and Europe and made it clear they were 'headed by ex-members of the Middle East concert party'.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, newspapers such as the *Evening Post* were careful to distinguish this private group from the official Kiwi Concert Party.¹²¹

The Entertainment Unit touring in Italy had mixed feelings about a private theatrical company trading on their reputation. Tony Rex claimed that when he was approached to join the K.C.P. Entertainments it was out of respect for Vaughan and the rest of the troupe that he declined.¹²² Although Vaughan was to eventually take over producing the company, he initially sought to prevent them from calling themselves the 'Kiwis'. With the support of Brigadier Stevens, Vaughan claimed that the term 'Kiwi' had acquired a similar status to that of 'Anzac' and that legislation should be introduced to prevent attempts 'to commercialise and turn to profit the sentimental and honourable association of this name'.¹²³ The War Cabinet, however, declined to approve the legislation and the matter was dropped. Upon his return to New Zealand Vaughan again voiced his disapproval of the private revue company, claiming '[t]here is one official Kiwi Concert Party, and its members are still entertaining the division in Italy'.¹²⁴ In another interview he stated he did not believe the Kiwi Concert Party would establish a permanent civilian revue, rather 'it was simply a product of the war and meant solely for the troops'. Moreover, he saw his work during the war as light relief and now planned to devote himself to serious music.¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ The Kiwis *Cairo Carnival* Programme, Theatre - The Kiwis 1945–1950, New Zealand Ephemera, George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries (GGSC).

¹¹⁹ Vaughan, p.69; The Kiwis *Cairo Carnival* and *Desert Days* Programmes, Theatre - The Kiwis 1945–1950, New Zealand Ephemera, GGSC.

¹²⁰ *Evening Post*, 14 November 1944, p.2.

¹²¹ *Evening Post*, 30 October 1944, p.3; 31 October 1944, p.3; 6 November 1944, p.7.

¹²² Rex, p.88.

¹²³ The Police Offences ("Kiwi") Emergency Regulations, 1944, Explanatory Memorandum, Personnel miscellaneous - "Kiwi" use of term by concert parties etc., AD 1 1414/ 345/1/994, ANZ.

¹²⁴ *N.Z. Truth*, 3 October 1945, p.5.

¹²⁵ *N.Z. Listener*, 21 September 1945, p.17.

By the end of the Entertainment Unit's time in Europe few of the original performers remained; however, the unit's official position within the New Zealand military ensured the company continued to perform. Vaughan had returned to New Zealand, leaving Noel Habgood and Ernie Fish in charge.¹²⁶ The Pacific Kiwi Concert Party had been established and some performers such as Ralph Dyer ended up performing with both the Pacific Kiwis and the original troupe touring Europe and the Middle East. In addition to this there was the private revue company performing under the banner of the Kiwis. Over the course of the war the Kiwi Concert Party had developed a strong, recognisable brand that encapsulated not just a single concert party, but a network of New Zealand military entertainment. Despite his initial reservations Vaughan eventually took over management of the K.C.P. Entertainments. Throughout their eight years as a civilian troupe they maintain the Kiwis' strong brand and established a cohesive 'story of the Kiwi Concert Party', one that ignored the troupe touring the Pacific and the initial contestation regarding the transition of the Kiwis to being a private revue company.



On his return to New Zealand, Vaughan was employed by Radio 2YA, where he produced a weekly programme of his own arrangements. Working with music that he described as 'light classical', he felt he was 'back in a familiar element'.¹²⁷ However, he had only just begun the job when he received a letter from K.C.P. Entertainments suggesting he take over the management of the troupe for a three month tour of Queensland, organized by the Australian theatre company J.C. Williamson Limited. The previous day Vaughan had received word from Noel Habgood that the Entertainment Unit was heading home and the performers would be returning to New Zealand in February.¹²⁸ Vaughan saw this as his opportunity to take control of the private revue company and, when the Entertainment Unit returned from Italy, form what he thought was the most appropriate troupe. It was not, however, Vaughan's intention to reproduce the 'original' Kiwis. Instead he drew together those he believed were the best performers. The advertisement below illustrates how this integration was promoted to

¹²⁶ Vaughan, p.65.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p.69.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p.69.

the public (see figure 2.6). The 'old favourites' were those who had been touring New Zealand with the private company; the performers from the Entertainment Unit who had arrived in New Zealand were seen as additions to this troupe. In many ways this illustrates the mutually beneficial relationship that had developed. Vaughan and the other recently returned Kiwis benefited from the public recognition K.C.P. Entertainments had developed over the previous two years, while the recruitment of Vaughan and company ensured the connection with the military unit was maintained.

HIS MAJESTY'S
Commencing
TONIGHT AT 8
FOR
10 Nights and 3 Matinees Only
FIRST MATINEE SAT. NEXT, 2 p.m.
FAREWELL TO NEW ZEALAND SEASON
"THE KIWIS"
"THE KIWIS"
All the Old Favourites;
JOHN HUNTER, DICK MARCROFT,
SNOWY TIMMS, TAFFY OWEN,
LIONEL BAILLY, EDDIE HEGAN, STAN
WINEERA, MAX BLAKE
With
WALLY PRICOR, BILL BAIN, "RED"
MOORE, CES MORRIS, TONY REX,
ERNIE FISH, MORRIE DOUBLE
And
The Kiwi Revue Orchestra of 11 Pieces under
Direction of
TERRY VAUGHAN, the Man who Made the
Original Kiwi Concert Party,
In
"TUNISIAN TEMPO"
"THE KIWIS" SIXTH AND GREATEST
NON-STOP HILARITY HIT
Book Today at Lewis Eady, Ltd.
Prices: D.C. and Reserved Stalls, 6/-; Un-
reserved Stalls, 4/-; Gallery, 2/-.
Matinees: D.C. and R.S., 5/-; Stalls, 3/-;
Gallery, 1/6 (all plus tax).
Children Half-price to D.C. and Stalls at
all performances except Saturday evening.
Direction: K.C.P. Entertainments, Ltd.

Figure 2.6: *New Zealand Herald*, 20 March 1946, p.10.

After a two week farewell season in Auckland the Kiwis Revue Company left for Brisbane in April 1946 for what was intended to be a three month tour of Queensland, but as seasons were extended and new shows booked they did not return until September 1950.¹²⁹ Early reviews expressed some surprise at the high standard of the shows, considering some of the soldier shows that had come before them. In Brisbane

¹²⁹ For the tours after the war Vaughan preferred to call them the Kiwis Revue to disassociate themselves from his notion of a 'concert party'. *Auckland Star*, 18 February 1964, section B, p.3.

the *Courier-Mail* claimed the Kiwis 'dispelled all memories of other combinations whose only claims to notice were on the grounds of sentiment'.¹³⁰ Success in Queensland led to a nine-week season in Adelaide, shows in Perth, and a repeat season in Adelaide. In Adelaide the *Advertiser* stated that '[i]nstead of something crude and amateurish as might have been expected, this all-soldier combination ... put over an entertainment which was original, polished and slickly produced'.¹³¹ As well as mentioning the quality of individual performers reviews emphasized the 'swift movement of events' and saw this as a credit to those who worked backstage.¹³² The attention to detail that Kirk-Burnnand saw as being essential during the war was clearly transferred to their civilian revue.¹³³

In December 1946 the Kiwis began what was seen by many of the performers as the highlight of their time with the company; a record-breaking season at the Melbourne Comedy Theatre of 859 performances extending over two years. After their success at the intimate Comedy Theatre the Kiwis moved on to Sydney where they set up at the Empire, one of the city's largest theatres. Initially there were some reservations as to whether they could fill such a large theatre, but the show was a success, breaking the theatre's long-run record with a 53 week season. In all, the Kiwis performed to around 850,000 Sydneysiders.¹³⁴ The Kiwis' success in Australia was both remarkable and puzzling to many commentators. Before opening in Sydney the *Sunday Herald* wondered, '[w]hy has the Kiwis' show, which is little more than a fast-moving smoke concert, so captured the imagination of Australians as to run for three years non-stop, in Melbourne's Comedy Theatre'.¹³⁵ Most reviewers agreed there was little new or original about the Kiwis' revue and while some preferred to see their success as a mystery, others put it down to their amateur enthusiasm and their ability to 'keep their work free of the glib and mechanical hand of run-of-the-mill professionalism'.¹³⁶

On the Kiwis' return to New Zealand they were promoted as a local production that had conquered Australia. Advertisements declared them 'Australia's Favourite

¹³⁰ *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), 15 April 1946, p.5.

¹³¹ *Advertiser*, 1 July 1946, p.7.

¹³² *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 18 May 1946, p.4; *Cairns Post*, 4 July 1946, p.6.

¹³³ 'Kiwi Concert Party Report by V.C. 26 July 1941', Tony Rex, fl 1940-1988, Papers relating to the Kiwi Concert Party, MS-Group-0807, AWWM.

¹³⁴ Vaughan, p.100.

¹³⁵ *Sunday Herald*, 23 January 1949, p.13.

¹³⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 April 1952, p.2.

Entertainers', yet still proudly 'New Zealand's Own'.¹³⁷ For some commentators, the reasons for the show's success were still unresolved. Jean Wishart from the *Woman's Weekly* remarked on the sense of nostalgic sentiment, highlighting 'the spark which kindles memories for ex-servicemen and the link they form for those who stayed at home and waited and prayed'. Yet even this, Wishart claimed, should not be enough for New Zealanders and Australians 'to pour their cash into the box office for five post-war years with no other reason at all'. Eventually she concluded that 'even if [audiences] can't quite figure out the reason for their record-breaking successes wherever they have gone, they will have to admit ... that a night at the Kiwis is always worth the time and money'.¹³⁸

Throughout their career as a commercial revue company, the Kiwis ensured audiences were aware of their connection with the wartime Entertainment Unit. On the cover of each programme, alongside an image of a kiwi bird and a silver fern, readers were reminded that this was the original Middle East Kiwi Concert Party that had served during the war (see figure 2.7).¹³⁹ A souvenir programme produced on the Kiwis' return to New Zealand established the Kiwis' story, reminding audiences of their experiences during the war, but leaving out more complicated elements of their past, such as the formation of the revue company while the Entertainment Unit was still in Europe.¹⁴⁰ Whereas the Diggers' connection with the New Zealand military diminished over the course of their career, the Kiwis' name, their official status within the military and the clear narrative they developed ensured that they were usually identified at the time as a 'New Zealand' concert party, and have been in subsequent accounts. Some contemporary Australian reviewers, however, recognized a trans-Tasman connection with one reviewer presenting them as a group which 'we in the Antipodes may be proud, while for another the show served as a reminder that 'we probably do not usually give the word Anzac the dual meaning it has'.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ *Otago Daily Times*, 18 January 1951, p.10.

¹³⁸ *Woman's Weekly*, 13 July 1950, n.p.; Theatre - The Kiwis 1951–1953, New Zealand Ephemera, GGSC.

¹³⁹ Theatre - The Kiwis 1951–1953, New Zealand Ephemera, GGSC.

¹⁴⁰ *Souvenir of the New Zealand Kiwis Revue*, Publication, D810.E8 SOU, AWMM

¹⁴¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 July 1949, p.4; *Barrier Daily Truth* (Broken Hill), 27 October 1927, n.p., Nola Miller, Papers relating to John Hunter and The Kiwis Revue Company, 77-244-6/16, ATL.

Chapter One

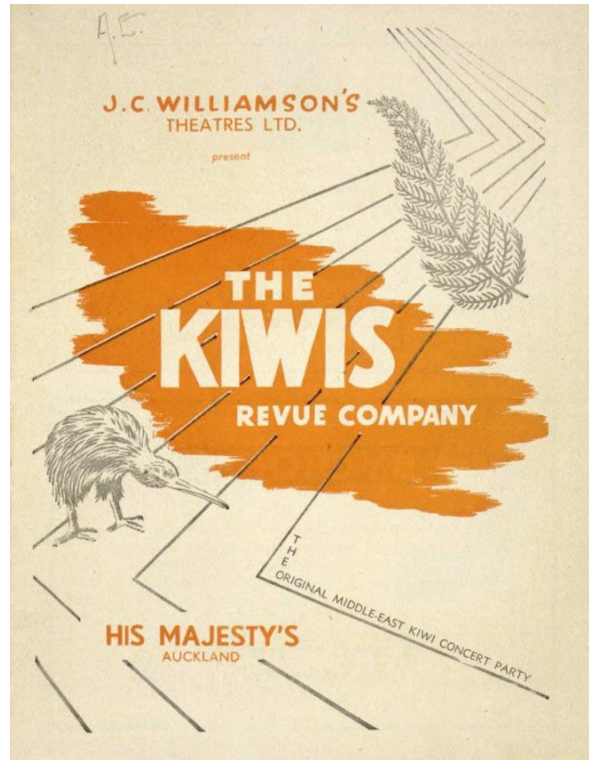


Figure 2.7: Programme cover for the Kiwis Revue Company, season commencing Tuesday 23rd May, 1950, Eph-A-VARIETY-1950-02-cover, ATL.



Figure 2.8: This image appeared in the Kiwis' souvenir programme and reminded viewers of the Kiwis' journey from the Middle East to Australia and New Zealand. J.C. Williamson Theatres Ltd: Souvenir of the New Zealand Kiwis Revue, pp.16-17, Eph-B-VARIETY-1950-01-16/17, ATL.

Despite this apparent close connection with New Zealand, the Kiwis paid little attention to developing performances that could be recognized as distinct to the nation. As with the concert parties of the First World War references to New Zealand are there to be found, from the 'Songs of the Maori Battalion' that featured in the *Alamein* production to the occasional haka.¹⁴² Yet, the most popular routines were those, such as Red Moore's impersonations of American celebrities, which drew on the audience's familiarity and fascination with a wider culture of entertainment.¹⁴³ *N.Z. Truth's* criticism that the Kiwis' show lacked a 'New Zealand character' illustrates their relative disinterest in producing material that was distinct to New Zealand and the limited influence of the cultural nationalist projects that Roberto Rabel argued encouraged nationalist expression during the Second World War.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Kiwis' popularity and the isolated nature of *N.Z. Truth's* criticism suggests that a significant number of theatre-goers were eager to see local entertainment that reflected their place within a transnational entertainment culture. Despite their ties to the New Zealand military, the Kiwis' connection with the nation always sat alongside other identities. National, imperial and trans-Tasman identities were all highlighted in their opening number, 'A Song to Start the Show', when they sang:

From the land of the long white cloud we come
Sons of the Empire everyone
Helping the motherland as of yore
Like our fathers the Anzacs did before.¹⁴⁵

For Vaughan the New Zealand tour of 1950-1951 marked the end of his time with the Kiwis. The company, however, continued with Glen Miller, and later Stan Wineera, taking over the production.¹⁴⁶ The Kiwis returned to Australia where their

¹⁴² Ivan Hanna, the soloist for 'Songs of the Maori Battalion', expressed some reservations about performing Maori songs both in terms of his pronunciation and whether, as a Pakeha, Maori would have wanted him performing 'their' songs. However, he claims that when he first performed for the 28th Maori Battalion the support he got from the audience was such that he knew 'they were not only going to be accepted but they were thrilled that somebody was performing one of their songs for them and to them'. Spectrum 422/423: 'Sing As We Go', RNZSA.

¹⁴³ *Courier-Mail*, 15 April 1946, p.5; *Morning Bulletin*, 18 May 1946, p.4; *Cairns Post*, 4 June 1946, p.6; *Sunday Times*, 25 August 1946, p.8.

¹⁴⁴ *N.Z. Truth*, 8 July 1953, p.4.

¹⁴⁵ D Series: Kiwi Concert Party, Excerpts from *Alamein*, D257/1-2, RNZSA.

¹⁴⁶ Vaughan, p.114.

success continued, with commentators still confounded by their enduring popularity.¹⁴⁷ In 1953 Vaughan was recruited again to assess the chances of the taking the show to London's West End.¹⁴⁸ Vaughan reported that there was considerable interest in the show, but success was far from guaranteed and all together too risky considering many of the Kiwis now had families in tow. A number of all-male revues made up predominately of ex-servicemen had toured Britain in the years following the war. With names like *Soldiers in Skirts*, *Forces Showboat* and *Forces in Petticoats* the drag performers played an even more prominent role in these revues than they did in the Kiwis' show. By the 1950s, however, these revues had lost their patriotic appeal as the number of ex-servicemen in the troupes declined and increasing homophobia drove drag performance underground.¹⁴⁹ How the Kiwis would have fared in this environment presents an intriguing counterfactual.

With the dream of performing in London abandoned the Kiwis returned to New Zealand in July 1953 to begin their farewell tour. They performed their last show at Auckland's His Majesty's Theatre on 16 January 1954 with many of the former Kiwis in attendance, including both Vaughan and Kirk-Burnnand.¹⁵⁰ Although their decision to end their show with a performance in New Zealand could be seen to reflect their ongoing connection with the nation, their fondest memories came from their shows during the war and in Australia. After their final show many of the performers cited their record-breaking 859 performance season at Melbourne's Comedy Theatre as their proudest achievement, while others wistfully reflected on their early days in the Middle East.¹⁵¹

Throughout the Kiwis' time as a civilian revue company they proved to be phenomenally popular. From their Brisbane tour in 1946 to the close of their 1953 New Zealand tour the Kiwis enjoyed over three million paid admissions, 490,000 of those coming from their New Zealand tours.¹⁵² The popularity of the Kiwis' tours suggests historians seeking to understand the ways in which the two world wars were remembered and commemorated should look beyond annual ceremonies, literature and

¹⁴⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 April 1952, p.2.

¹⁴⁸ Rex, p.90; Vaughan, p.104.

¹⁴⁹ Baker, pp.196–97.

¹⁵⁰ *Auckland Star*, 18 January 1954, p.4; Vaughan, p.114.

¹⁵¹ *Auckland Star*, 15 January 1954, p.14.

¹⁵² Tony Rex, fl 1940–1988, Papers relating to the Kiwi Concert Party, MS-Group-0807, ATL.

war monuments. While Robinson presents the slump in Anzac Day ceremony attendance and collapse of Armistice Day as part of a general decline in war remembrance following the Second World War, the popularity of the Kiwis' show suggests the New Zealand and Australian public responded enthusiastically to other forms of remembrance that may be less familiar today.



As a number of historians have highlighted, separate Australian and New Zealand national identities have been constructed out of a number of shared experiences. The concert parties, however, point towards a wider transnational culture of popular entertainment, but one that was performed on a trans-Tasman stage.¹⁵³ Australians and New Zealanders may have been fellow Anzacs, but Australia, as it is today, was also the closest large audience in a wider world of popular entertainment. Like Hanna before him, Vaughan developed a career in the Australian entertainment industry after the Kiwis retired from the stage. In 1965 he became director of the newly established Canberra Theatre Company and held the role until 1980, the year he was awarded an OBE for services to Australian theatre.¹⁵⁴ Yet, while Hanna can be retrospectively heralded as an archetypal 'digger', Vaughan's most popular role, as the leader of a troupe called the Kiwis, makes him an uncomfortable fit for those looking to establish a national history of Australian entertainment.

The Kiwis' connection with 'New Zealand' may have been more entrenched than their First World War counterparts, but responses to the shows illustrates that audiences' interpretations were never singular or fixed. The *N.Z. Truth* reporter may have bemoaned the Kiwis' lack of local content, but others recognized the troupe as 'New Zealand's Own' regardless of whether their material evoked this connection with the nation. Others still were reminded of the relationship between New Zealand and Australia, or New Zealand's place within the British Empire, while some were simply proud to see performers from their home town or city succeed on the stage. As Deborah Montgomerie has highlighted, projects which seek to write the nation backwards and go

¹⁵³ Philippa Mein Smith, 'The Tasman World', in Giselle Byrnes, ed., *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, South Melbourne, 2009, p.314; Christopher Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience: New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War*, Auckland, 2004, p.21; Rabel, p.253.

¹⁵⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 30 April 1996, section 1, p.4.

looking for references to 'New Zealand' as proof of a national or nationalist consciousness in the early twentieth century do so at the expense of other collective identities that were also part of the cultural landscape.¹⁵⁵ Despite the Kiwis' more defined identity as a 'New Zealand' concert party their performances reveal some of the continuities in New Zealand cultural history. Rather than working to construct a new independent cultural identity, the concert parties of both wars drew on their audiences' fascination with new cultural imports, with the occasional use of New Zealand motifs to distinguish their entertainment. An awareness of this continuity should serve to temper claims that New Zealand underwent a dramatic cultural shift in the interwar years and should also draw attention to the frequently overlooked groups of New Zealanders who revelled in seeing local entertainers stage professional and entertaining performances, with little concern as to whether or not they contributed to a distinctive national culture.

In the years immediately following the Second World War the traditions that had been developed in response to the First World War had lost much of their potency and the sentiments that have driven the recent resurgence in war remembrance, such as its place in narratives of national maturation and the desire to honour veterans while some remained, were yet to be established. In this liminal stage the Kiwis appealed to neither the 'sorrow and pride' of interwar memorials, nor the nationalist rhetoric of more recent ceremonies, but rather, like their First World War counterparts, sought to illustrate how soldiers could take happy memories from the war and celebrate the male camaraderie fostered there. The performers presented a model of masculinity that may be less compatible with how First and Second World War soldiers are presented today, but nonetheless they responded to the gender anxieties of the time. The next chapter explores these anxieties and considers how the concert party performers fit with some of the narratives that have been employed to construct a history of masculinity.

¹⁵⁵ Montgomerie, 'Anzac Anthems'.

Chapter Two

'A Taste of Civvy Street':

Masculinity, Heroic Adventure and Domesticity

In February 1953 the Melbourne daily the *Argus* announced the marriage of Bruce Hays, stage manager for the Kiwis Revue Company, and Patricia Ransom of Sydney, claiming that '[w]hen the Kiwis first arrived here in 1946 it was practically a bachelor team, but one by one they have married, until now all are either married or engaged'.¹ The *Argus* had been closely following the romantic developments of the Kiwis' performers. The engagement of Bruce Miller had featured in the paper just two days earlier and in April, when Maurice Tansley married Brisbane woman Wilma Thomson, the paper announced he had 'forfeited his title as the last bachelor of the Kiwi Company'.²

In the *Argus's* reports the Kiwis' performers were presented as returned soldiers ready to settle down and become respectable family men, while retaining their place in the masculine environment of the veteran concert party. In many respects this picture of the Kiwis conforms to the standard interpretations of attitudes towards domesticity and masculinity in the late 1940s and 1950s, as men were encouraged to reconcile their yearning for the male bonding and adventure of military service, with the appeal of marriage and fatherhood.³ Onstage the Kiwis explicitly drew on idealized images of masculine camaraderie; offstage they cultivated an image of settled family men, happily marrying and starting families. This portrayal responded to specific anxieties following the Second World War, but it also reflects a longer tradition of soldier concert parties acting as intermediaries between 'home' and 'war', a tradition that was also evident during the First World War. This role in connecting idealized images of domesticity and masculinity makes soldier concert parties a valuable interpretive tool for examining

¹ *Argus* (Melbourne), 7 February 1953, p.5.

² *Argus*, 5 February 1953, p.18; 10 April 1953, p.3.

³ Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male — A History*, Auckland, 1987, pp.264–66; Martin Francis, 'A Flight from Commitment? Domesticity, Adventure and the Masculine Imaginary in Britain after the Second World War', *Gender and History*, 19, 1, 2007, pp.163–85; Jonathan Bollen, Adrian Kiernander and Bruce Parr, *Men at Play: Masculinities in Australian Theatre since the 1950s*, New York, 2008, p.93.

how the performers and their audience reflected and responded to shifting attitudes towards manliness and masculinities in the first half of the twentieth century.⁴

While Jock Phillips' 1987 text *A Man's Country?* was pioneering in its examination of the role of war in shifting models of exemplary masculinity in New Zealand history, in the years following its publication there has been a shortage of work that has built on his findings.⁵ Outside of New Zealand, however, the role of war in shaping notions of ideal masculinity has received significant scholarly attention. According to Martin Francis, British historians of masculinity have established the 'domestication of the male' as the central narrative for histories of masculinity in the first half of the twentieth century.⁶ Francis argued that writing on the period from the 1870s to 1914 has been greatly influenced by John Tosh's picture of the 'flight from domesticity', whereby men resisted the increasing role of domesticity in their everyday lives.⁷ Within the narrative of domestication the First World War has figured as a significant turning point, as the horrifying experience of war was seen to have destabilized chivalric notions of masculinity that were established during the Victorian 'flight from domesticity'.⁸ Alison Light argued that in response to the First World War the 1920s and 1930s saw a decline of the formerly heroic and officially masculine public rhetorics in favour of a vision of Englishness that was less imperial, more domestic and, in terms of pre-war standards, more 'feminine'.⁹ Sonya Rose's work followed on from Light's picture of interwar 're-domestication'. Rose argued that the 'remasculinisation' of Britain during the Second World War saw the promotion of a more restrained model of 'temperate masculinity' that rejected the heroic ideal of the First World War by incorporating a greater

⁴ In this thesis 'manliness' is used as it was understood in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The term implied there was a single standard of manhood, which was to be aspired to and demonstrated through certain attributes and dispositions. 'Masculinities' is used in a more neutral and descriptive way with a greater awareness of the diversity of identities and their contradictory characteristics. See John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth Century Britain*, Harlow, 2005.

⁵ Phillips; Deborah Montgomerie, 'Reconnaissance: Twentieth-Century New Zealand War History at Century's Turn', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 37, 1, 2003, pp.73–74.

⁶ Martin Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity', *Historical Journal*, 45, 3, 2002, pp.637–52.

⁷ Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male?', p.639; John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, New Haven, 1999.

⁸ Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male?', pp.640–41.

⁹ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism between the Wars*, London, 1991, p.8.

appreciation of domesticity and 'ordinariness'.¹⁰ This model of 'temperate masculinity' sought to strike a balance between the fascist hyper-masculinity that had taken root in Germany and Italy and the effeminate or conventionally unmanly.¹¹

This narrative of domestication has effectively portrayed masculinity as being in flux and subject to the power relations of the time. However, Martin Francis has questioned the usefulness of unproblematic chronologies of domestication by demonstrating the ways in which men were attracted at once to both domesticity and the fantasies of adventure and male bonding.¹² Tosh himself stressed the importance of not exaggerating the 'flight from domesticity', claiming it was class specific and not widely held among the working classes.¹³ Francis has called for an awareness that 'men were continually seeking to reconcile and integrate the contradictory impulses of domestic responsibility and escapism'.¹⁴ In his own research Francis has examined the late 1940s and 1950s, supposedly 'the apogee of domesticity in modern Britain', and argued that this focus on domesticity and the 'baby boom' has obscured male restlessness and yearning for the emotionally satisfying aspects of wartime male bonding. Francis argued that in this period British men experienced a 'flight from commitment', but unlike the nineteenth century 'flight from domesticity', it occurred largely in the realm of the imagined in novels and films, rather than the social or institutional.¹⁵ Although Francis is certainly not the only historian to problematize the narrative of domestication, his understanding of the often simultaneous yearning for domesticity and masculine adventure is of particular relevance for this chapter.

Developments in British historiography provide an obvious lead for historians seeking to construct a history of masculinity in New Zealand, but we should not forget cultural similarities with another settler society, the USA. Margaret Marsh has argued that in America from the late nineteenth century the rise of companionate marriages, middle class job security, suburbanisation and the developing feminist movement

¹⁰ Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male?', p.647; Sonya Rose 'Temperate Heroes: Concepts of Masculinity in Second World War Britain', in Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, eds, *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, New York, 2004, pp.177–90.

¹¹ Rose, p.192; Leo Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity*, New York, 2003, p.425.

¹² Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male?', p.652.

¹³ Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, p.206.

¹⁴ Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male?', p.643.

¹⁵ Francis, 'A Flight from Commitment?', p.181.

presented an implicit challenge to the cult of masculinity.¹⁶ Marsh presented a picture of masculine domesticity very much like Alison Light's imagining of interwar Britain, but unlike Light, Marsh focused on the influence of changes in employment and living environments on notions of masculinity.¹⁷ Marsh argued that as more middle class men took on secure salaried work with regular hours, many enjoyed the opportunity to spend their increased leisure time with their families.¹⁸ Furthermore, by considering the emergence of 'the contented suburban father' alongside the rise of football, boxing and adventure novels, Marsh explored a longer tradition of men reconciling the simultaneous appeal of masculine fantasy and the pleasures of domestic life.¹⁹ As men became more actively involved in the domestic sphere, aggressiveness was increasingly expressed within safe outlets and the realm of fantasy. Marsh argued that since these activities were frequently shared with the family, and sons in particular, the 'concepts of masculine domesticity and "manliness" were in many ways more complementary than antithetical'.²⁰

Marsh illustrated men's ability to reconcile the perceived contradictions between aggressive and domestic models of masculinity, yet work on the New Zealand 'family man' has emphasized the enduring tension between alternate models of masculinity. Jock Phillips' highlighted the importance of government policy at the turn of the twentieth century and the work of groups such as Truby King's Society for Promoting the Health of Women and Children in promoting the cult of domesticity.²¹ By the 1920s, Phillips argued, the ideal of the sentimental family was entrenched; the vast majority of men in the interwar years were committed family men.²² However, Phillips stressed the continuing conflict as men responded to the demands of '[t]wo cultures and two value systems: the world of men and the world of women'.²³ Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith followed on from Phillips' work as they explored the ways in which the 'cult of domesticity' sought to reconcile the contradictions between what they perceived to be

¹⁶ Margaret Marsh, 'Suburban Men and Masculine Domesticity, 1870–1915', in Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds, *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, Chicago, 1990, pp.111–27.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.112.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.124.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.122.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.122.

²¹ Phillips, p.223.

²² *ibid.*, p.225.

²³ *ibid.*, p.259.

two opposing models of masculinity: the 'man alone' and the 'family man'.²⁴ James and Saville-Smith argued that by the early twentieth century a male culture developed that attempted to combine the satisfying elements of both the 'man alone' and 'family man'. This was maintained through the 'institutionalization of male mateship' within spaces such as sports and service clubs.²⁵ However, like Phillips, James and Saville-Smith present an 'inherent conflict' between the 'man alone' and the 'family man', which, they argued, ensured tensions between these two opposing models would endure throughout the twentieth century.²⁶

As the work of Phillips and James and Saville-Smith suggests, the debates concerning constructions of masculinity in Britain and North America are of great significance for those examining histories of masculinity in New Zealand and Australia. Martin Crotty's history of 'the Australian male', for example, largely conformed to the standard narrative of domestication. Crotty argued that from 1870 Australian masculinity was increasingly configured as anti-feminine and anti-intellectual. Crotty claimed that militarist constructions of manliness 'reached their logical culmination in the idolisation of the Anzac soldier and the glorification of the war experience during the First World War'.²⁷ Crotty followed this narrative into the interwar period, arguing that in the 1920s Australian culture became more feminine and domestic as the 'ideals formulated in the schools and the parade grounds were destroyed in the mud and trenches'.²⁸

Recent work by a number of New Zealand historians, too, suggests the shifts in constructions of masculinity in Britain and North America may have been even more closely tied to New Zealand than previously thought. David Thomson's assertion that the 'frontier effect' on New Zealand families in the nineteenth century has been exaggerated, and that families in New Zealand, and Australia, largely conformed to English trends is especially relevant.²⁹ Miles Fairburn's argument that New Zealand's

²⁴ Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith, *Gender, Culture and Power: Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture*, rev. edn, Auckland, 1994, p.37.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.41.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.40.

²⁷ Martin Crotty, *Making the Australian Male: Middle-Class Masculinity in Australia 1870–1920*, Carlton, 2001, p.227.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.230.

²⁹ David Thomson, 'Marriage and the Family on the Colonial Frontier', in Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney, eds, *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand's Pasts*, Dunedin, 2006, pp.119–42.

exceptionalism comes, not from the development of an autochthonous culture, but from its 'unique pastiche' due to its people being unusually heavy borrowers of other cultures, the British, Australian and American in particular, is also pertinent.³⁰ The work of Thomson and Fairburn sits comfortably alongside Giselle Byrnes's wider call for historians to examine the extent to which, rather than having an exceptional history, aspects of New Zealand life 'are, and always have been, part of a much larger canvas'.³¹ Historians in New Zealand should engage with the historiography from outside of New Zealand, not just for comparative analysis, but to consider the transnational resonance of these models. Furthermore, the wider historiography points towards some of the potential obstacles in attempts to identify a distinct 'kiwi bloke'. The typical 'kiwi bloke' might not be that distinct after all.

Although *A Man's Country?* was published before the above narrative of domestication had been established, in many ways it followed the same basic structure. Phillips' text was explicitly a history of the construction of the image of the Pakeha male, not a history of the Pakeha male himself.³² As Phillips moved through the 'pioneer male' to the interwar 'family man' and the post-World War II 'bloke under siege' he charted the gradual shift as New Zealand went from a frontier land where strong, practical men were able to prove their masculinity, to a modern consumerist society where men became domesticated and figures like the 'pioneer male' moved into the realm of national mythology.³³ These stock images were interspersed with other figures such as the 'boozier', the 'hard man' of rugby and the 'man's man' of war, that illustrated the enduring appeal of more uncompromising masculine ideals. While these images follow each other in rough chronological order, there was always an overlap between these stereotypes.³⁴ In a sense this technique effectively portrayed the ambivalence many

³⁰ Miles Fairburn, 'Is There a Good Case for New Zealand Exceptionalism', in Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney, eds, *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand's Pasts*, Dunedin, 2006, p.167.

³¹ Giselle Byrnes, 'Introduction: Reframing New Zealand History', in Giselle Byrnes, ed., *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, South Melbourne, 2009, p.1.

³² One of the criticisms of Phillips' text has been that it failed to distinguish the ideal from the reality and that the focus on identifying male stereotypes was done at the expense of examining the practices that constitute masculine behaviour. Robin Law, Hugh Campbell and John Dolan, 'Introduction', in Robin Law, Hugh Campbell and John Dolan, eds, *Masculinities in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Palmerston North, 1999, p.22.

³³ Phillips, pp.30, 39, 265.

³⁴ In an interview Phillips suggested this chronology was as much formed by his own experience growing up as it was by New Zealand history. Ruth Schick and John Dolan, 'Masculinity and *A Man's Country* in 1998: An Interview with Jock Phillips', in Robin Law, Hugh Campbell and John Dolan, eds, *Masculinities in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Palmerston North, 1999, p.47.

men would have felt about these often contradictory ideals, however, at times it prevented Phillips from examining how these models worked together. As mentioned earlier, Phillips presented the 'family man' as being at odds with the 'man's man' of war and saw the transition of New Zealand men from soldier to 'family man' as characterized by resentment and discomfort.³⁵ By setting these figures out as necessarily conflicting ideals Phillips largely obscured the extent to which men were able to reconcile these perceived contradictions.

For soldiers serving overseas 'home' was always an imagined space and a point of contrast. Stephen Garton has argued that for Australian men in the masculine world of war, home became 'the place of women, domesticity, constrained masculinity and "the shirker" — the non-man'.³⁶ Whereas historians such as Phillips and Garton have emphasized the separation between military and civilian environments, recent scholarship has highlighted the closer connection between war and domesticity. Joanna Bourke claimed that soldiers remained engrossed in lives back home and that this continued to be seen as 'reality'.³⁷ While Michael Roper, examining soldiers' letters to their mothers, argued that the conditions of warfare did not create an unbridgeable gap between the trenches and home; bonds between men were not always formed in opposition to home, and men's domestic attachments were often shared and acknowledged among soldiers.³⁸ In a similar vein, recent work by Deborah Montgomerie on the letter writing practices of a number of New Zealand soldiers during the Second World War argued that they too reflected 'a more comfortable fit between masculinity and domesticity' than Jock Phillips' work suggested.³⁹ Montgomerie used the letters of Bob Wilson in particular to illustrate a soldier's desire to remain connected with domestic life and to be seen as a responsible and caring son.⁴⁰ This body of work has revealed a frequently overlooked level of affection for, and emotional reliance on, domesticity and 'feminine values'. This chapter builds upon that work by

³⁵ Phillips, p.213.

³⁶ Stephen Garton, 'Return Home: War, Masculinity and Repatriation', in Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake, eds, *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, 1995, p.191.

³⁷ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, Chicago, 1996, p.22.

³⁸ Michael Roper, 'Maternal Relations: Moral Manliness and Emotional Survival in Letters Home during the First World War', in Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, eds, *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, New York, 2004, p.307.

³⁹ Deborah Montgomerie, *Love in Time of War: Letter Writing in the Second World War*, Auckland, 2005, p.134.

⁴⁰ Montgomerie, *Love in Time of War*, p.43.

illustrating how soldiers' connection with home was not limited to their immediate family; it was also expressed in their desire to recapture the public life and entertainment they had enjoyed before the war.

With their emphasis on both memories of home and military service, soldier concert parties were constantly engaged with connecting war and domesticity in the realm of the imaginary. Wartime shows reminded the audience and performers of their passion for drama and music; post-war civilian tours promoted a spirit of masculine camaraderie fostered through war. Francis depicted visions of heroic adventure as an imagined escape from the realities of domestic responsibility, but this relationship was flipped during the war and performances evoked idealized memories of home and femininity.⁴¹ This ongoing connection between war and home makes concert parties a valuable site for examining the relationship between domesticity and masculinity. Elements of the 'domestication of the male' narrative are evident as concert party members shifted from being seen as 'warrior entertainers' after the Great War to promoting more restrained models of masculinity in the Second World War. But the concert party performances also demonstrate the extent to which the simultaneous, and seemingly contradictory, yearning for both domestic responsibility and heroic adventure was ever present as the Diggers became the Kiwis.



As a number of historians of the First World War have argued, the expectation that war would provide men with an opportunity to prove their manliness was destroyed when they faced the brutality and anonymity of modern, industrial war.⁴² On the front line, Leo Braudy claimed, 'the soldier was less a modern version of a chivalric knight than a military version of a factory worker, doing his coglike part in the military machine'.⁴³ However, the brutality of the Great War did not provoke a complete rejection of militarist constructions of masculinity. Jock Phillips argued that despite the cost of the conflict, 'the Great War established the soldier as the shining personification of the New Zealand male, and indeed New Zealand itself'.⁴⁴ Yet in order for this ideal to be accepted,

⁴¹ Francis, 'Domestication of the Male?', p.643.

⁴² *ibid.*, pp.640-41; Braudy, pp.380-85; Crotty, p.227; Phillips, p.177.

⁴³ Braudy, p.385.

⁴⁴ Phillips, p.163.

New Zealand soldiers had to be seen to resist being brutalized by a new environment in which they were required to both endure and perform extreme acts of violence. As Stéphane Audion-Rouzeau and Annette Becker have argued, the maintenance of cultural life and peacetime social practices on the front illustrates the extent to which soldiers attempted to maintain societal norms throughout the war.⁴⁵ When the concert party performers took to the stage, or were featured in promotion, they presented an image of the New Zealand soldier that retained the characteristics of an ideal civilian, while making his contribution to the war effort.

The values that the New Zealand Pierrots' leader Tano Fama was seen to embody, and respect in others, illustrates this focus on characteristics that were valued in both civilian and martial society. Before forming the New Zealand Pierrots with Stan Lawson, Fama served as a stretcher-bearer with the 5th Reinforcements. Following the Battle of the Somme he wrote an open letter to portray the battle 'from a New Zealand stretcher bearer's point of view'. Fama's letter disrupted the traditional hierarchy of military service by focusing on those who supported soldiers in the front line rather than those in the trenches. Through praising the learned expertise of the doctors and moral support of the Y.M.C.A. Fama eschewed the notion that men should aspire to a physical, aggressive embodiment of manliness. Penned soon after he arrived in Europe, his letter suggests these were not views developed as a result of the brutality of war but, rather, a perpetuation of the values he admired in civilian society.⁴⁶ A similar attitude was evident when others reflected on Fama's own character. Although Fama was frequently praised for his bravery as a stretcher-bearer, his humane and less militaristic qualities were more frequently emphasized. *N.Z. Truth* described him as 'a fine example of a man who has acquired the habit of popularity — not the catch-penny kind, but the popularity that has its roots in sterling human qualities'.⁴⁷ When he died in 1940 obituaries praised Fama for his gentle nature and versatility as a performer; he was portrayed as 'a man of fun'.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Stéphane Audion-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *1914–1918: Understanding the Great War*, London, 2002 p.36.

⁴⁶ Tano Fama, d 1940: Correspondence and newspaper clippings, MS-Papers-10732, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington (ATL).

⁴⁷ *N.Z. Truth*, 11 April 1929, p.6.

⁴⁸ Fama - Bolton collection, fMS-Papers-9286, ATL.

In a similar manner those who emphasized Theo Trezise's valuable contribution to the WWI Kiwis highlighted characteristics that fit awkwardly with a heroic image of military manliness. Trezise had accrued years of experience in opera and musical comedy in London before the war and both McKinlay and Lyttleton claimed his addition to the troupe significantly improved the standard of the Kiwis' shows. Lyttleton declared him 'by far the most important of all' the Kiwis, while McKinlay claimed his 'flair for making up and dressing ... lent a much-needed touch of colour to our programmes'.⁴⁹ Trezise had previously been putting on shows at the Hornchurch convalescent camp where he wrote and produced the pantomime *Achi Baba and the More or Less Forty Thieves* for Christmas 1916, which was performed by the Kiwis the following year.⁵⁰ When poor health eventually forced Trezise to leave the division in early 1918, a legacy of his involvement in the Gallipoli campaign, the *Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F* reflected that '[t]hough he has gone, the atmosphere remains charged with the peculiar grace, daintiness, and vitality that characterised him'.⁵¹ After the war Trezise returned to New Zealand and became an important figure in Wellington's artistic and emerging queer circles where he taught dance, provided assistance to dramatic groups and managed the Goring Street 'Cabaret'.⁵²

Whether it is Trezise's 'peculiar grace' or Fama's praise for those in support roles, concert party performers unsettle restrictive visions of military manliness. Yet their value to the war effort was continually recognized by military officials. On the night of Trezise's last appearance for the Kiwis, Major-General Andrew Russell took to the stage to publically thank him for his contribution to the division.⁵³ Not that the value of the concert parties was immediately recognized by all. J.G. Fuller argued that when concert parties were first being formed there was some hostility amongst officials who saw the performances as 'luxuries' and not in keeping with the seriousness of war.⁵⁴ For those officials who believed war was to be a glorious and edifying adventure, groups

⁴⁹ Ernest McKinlay, *Ways and by-Ways of a Singing Kiwi: With the N.Z. Divisional Entertainers in France*, Dunedin, 1939, pp.61, 92; George Clyne Lyttleton, 'Pierrots in Picardy: a khaki chronicle, by one of them', Unpublished Manuscript, p.56, MS242. Auckland War Memorial Museum (AWMM).

⁵⁰ *Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F.*, 27 December 1916, p.205; 17 January 1917, p.228.

⁵¹ *Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F.*, 30 January 1918, p.284.

⁵² Chris Brickell, *Mates & Lovers: A History of Gay New Zealand*, Auckland, 2008, p.106.

⁵³ *Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F.*, 30 January 1918, p.284.

⁵⁴ J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*, Oxford, 1991, p.95.

such as concert parties reflected soldiers' inability to face this challenge.⁵⁵ While this official resistance was short-lived, some performers continued to feel their service was undervalued. Ernest McKinlay of the Kiwis hinted at some popular resentment when he presented the support from Russell as a response to 'those croakers at home, who at that time thought we were not doing our bit, because we did not live actually in the front line'.⁵⁶ The concert parties' eventual ubiquity and the support they received from officials and soldiers suggests opposition was limited, but this potential for resistance played an important part in the promotion of concert party performers as 'real' soldiers making a valuable contribution to the war effort.

Frequently reports reflected the drudgery and moments of danger that concert party performers faced. In a semi-regular column in *Chronicle of the N.Z.E.F.* Trezise provided updates on the progress of the Kiwis and in one report focused on a night 'old Fritz threw a large species of shell (disgustingly dangerous variety) all round the theatre from ten till twelve'.⁵⁷ Trezise highlighted the peril the concert party faced, but included a decent dose of humour to suggest they could cope with whatever challenges they were confronted with. Yet this focus on the threats concert party performers endured was tempered with an awareness that they were fortunate to be away from more immediate danger. McKinlay recalled the experience of a Christmas dinner at which:

[W]e learned of the death of two of our former members, one an original performer, George Carr, and the other our first flautist, Len Poore. Both were killed in the heavy fighting round Hooze Crater, and their tragic deaths only served to remind us the more how fortunate we were to be even five miles or so back from the front line, a fact which I feel sure we all appreciated.⁵⁸

Concert party performers were required to live up to the expectations of soldierly masculinity, yet still recognize the comparatively safe role they had within the war effort.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.95.

⁵⁶ McKinlay, p.92.

⁵⁷ *Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F.*, 11 July 1917, p.226.

⁵⁸ McKinlay, p.89.

In their public promotion and praise concert party performers were seen to represent a broader ability of New Zealand soldiers to retain their good character, rather than be brutalized by the war experience. In this respect they embodied what Jock Phillips labelled the 'public myth' of the Great War; that New Zealand soldiers possessed a 'modest chivalry' and remained respectable family men despite their absence from domestic and civilian society.⁵⁹ Phillips contrasted this with the 'private myth' in which men drank, fought and visited prostitutes while away on military service.⁶⁰ Yet in Phillips' account this 'private myth' was frequently taken to be the reality, and in the process those who made a genuine commitment to behave properly throughout the war were overlooked. In their public promotion concert party performers contributed to this 'official' image of the New Zealand soldier, but their private lives and responses to the war provide a reminder that this portrayal encapsulated the attitudes many soldiers truly held.

After the war, as the New Zealand Pierrots became the Diggers, the performers were seen to present a lighter side of the war and recall memories of laughter and entertainment away from front line.⁶¹ Along with the other soldier concert parties touring Australia, the Diggers were referred to as 'warrior entertainers' as promoters sought to align the performances with a familiar model of military masculinity.⁶² Just as not all First World War soldiers ascribed to the model of heroic or chivalric masculinity, the Great War did not provoke a complete transformation of masculine ideals. While Alison Light highlighted the rise in conservative domesticity in the interwar years, the traditional adventure culture continued to be celebrated. As Martin Francis explained, writers such as John Buchan and poets of the 'Auden Generation' continued to celebrate adventure and muscular physicality rather than the comforts of suburban domesticity.⁶³ The concert party performers may have illustrated the continued relevance of civilian values and characteristics during the brutality of war, but their promotion following the

⁵⁹ Phillips, p.168.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, pp.179–91.

⁶¹ *Auckland Star*, 12 July 1919, p.3; *Poverty Bay Herald*, 26 September 1919, p.3; *Argus*, 19 July 1920, p.8.

⁶² Richard Fotheringham, 'Diggers Company', in Victoria Chance and Philip Parsons, eds, *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, Sydney, 1995, p.191.

⁶³ Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male?', p.643. See also, Kelly Boyd, 'Knowing Your Place: The Tensions of Manliness in Boys' Story Papers, 1918–39', in Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, London, 1991, pp.145–67.

war as 'warrior entertainers' responded to the continued appeal of models of heroic manliness in the interwar years.

When the Kiwi Concert Party was formed during the Second World War, concert party performers again presented an image of soldiers as restrained and cultured, with an even greater emphasis on respectability. As Vaughan became more confident in his orchestra's ability, and their audience's taste, he gradually introduced music of a more 'distinguished parentage' with revues that showcased the works of composers such as Ravel, Tchaikovsky and Saint-Saëns.⁶⁴ Vaughan recognized that the music performed had to suit the occasion, but he also believed it was wrong 'to underestimate one's audience, even one of seemingly tough soldiers'.⁶⁵ One of the shows' most popular features was Vaughan's turn as 'Leopold Popoffsky/Popowski' in which, along with his orchestra, he demonstrated a mastery of what would have been considered 'serious music' while parodying its perceived pretensions.



Figure 3.1: Terry Vaughan as Leopold Popoffsky/Popowski, PAColl-4161-08, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

⁶⁴ Terry Vaughan, 'A Pedalpoint: The Kiwi Concert Party in North Africa', *Music in New Zealand*, 11, 1990, p.37.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.36.

This commitment to producing respectable entertainment presents an instructive challenge to the more familiar mythology surrounding the New Zealand soldier of the Second World War. Writing on World War II, Phillips claimed that ‘the overwhelming image of the New Zealand soldier in the literature of World War II is of a “hard man”’.⁶⁶ This ‘hard man’ never admitted fear, weakness or pain; he also drank, swore and was at odds with civilized society. Phillips claimed this image was perhaps best exemplified by Victoria Cross and Bar recipient Charles Upham. Upham’s bravery, strength and leadership, not to mention swearing and drinking, were understood to be a result of his life as a shepherd and musterer in high country Canterbury, and were celebrated as such.⁶⁷ This image does not, however, fit with the Kiwi Concert Party. Terry Vaughan’s ability in composition, direction and performance were developed first at Canterbury College and then under the direction of Sir Henry Wood at the Royal Academy of Music in London.⁶⁸ Vaughan was far from being the only member of the Kiwis with an impressive musical pedigree. Maurice Clare had been deputy leader of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Jim Millins had worked in stage management in London’s West End, and Colin McBryde had run a theatre company in Canterbury, England.⁶⁹ Although the focus was on light entertainment, all of the performers were committed to producing a show that was clean and respectable. They were not catering to the tastes of the imagined swearing, drinking, larrikin soldier.

The Kiwis’ public image underscored their professionalism and respectability, but like their Great War counterparts, reports stressed that they were willing soldiers who performed, not to avoid the trenches, but because it was the most valuable contribution they could make to the war effort. The Kiwis went to great lengths to stress that they were ‘real soldiers’, infantry trained and ready for battle. Soon after their formation, while entertaining New Zealand troops serving in Crete, the soldiers came under heavy German air raids. The Kiwis became attached to the New Zealand 20th

⁶⁶ Phillips, p.212.

⁶⁷ However, Phillips’ image of Charles Upham as the ‘pioneer male’ may say more about how Upham was imagined in the mid-1980s, when Phillips was writing, than how he was portrayed at the time of the war. In a short profile on Upham in the *N.Z.E.F. Times* in 1941 he was described as ‘son of Mr J.H. Upham a well-known solicitor ... was educated at Christ’s College and at Lincoln Agricultural College’. *N.Z.E.F. Times*, 20 October 1941, p.4.

⁶⁸ Phillips p.201; ‘Speech for launch of Terry Vaughan’s Whistle as we go’, John Mansfield Thomson Papers, MS-Papers-5405, ATL.

⁶⁹ Terry Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go: The Story of the Kiwi Concert Party and Terry Vaughan*, Auckland, 1995, pp.18, 47.

Battalion as an infantry platoon and had to undergo a strenuous march across the mountain ranges.⁷⁰ Five of the Kiwis were taken prisoner, but this experience became a central part of the Kiwis' mythology and was presented as proof they could deal with the rigors of army life. Tony Rex claimed their 'exposure to strafing, dive-bombing and being used in the front line strengthened our claim that we were a combat unit, ready at all times to be of use in the battle if required'. Moreover, Rex claimed that following the event there was a 'new respect for us among the fighting troops and thereafter we were received as one of them'.⁷¹

After spending almost two years performing for soldiers near the front line, the 1943 furlough tour of New Zealand gave the Kiwis an opportunity to exhibit their material in a new environment. The success of the tour suggests that the public saw the Kiwis as appropriate representatives of the New Zealand military. Yet praise for the Kiwis was not unanimous. A letter to the *Otago Daily Times* asserted it was the 'morale of our men that made them "stick their toes in" ... [t]he "guts" to do those jobs were not given by a concert party'.⁷² For this commentator the concert party performers were clearly not seen as 'our men' and, presumably, did not conform to the writer's ideal of military masculinity. Yet, part of the appeal of the concert party performers of both wars was their ability to publically reconcile civilian values with the new demands that men at war faced. Whereas novels such as Robin Hyde's *Passport to Hell* or John A. Lee's *Civilian into Soldier* suggested that the characteristics that were valued during war were those that were most distasteful in civilian society, the concert parties of both wars presented men who could make a valuable contribution to the war effort, but still maintain the values that would suit family and civilian life.⁷³ In doing so they responded to fears that men could be overmasculinized or brutalized by war and become too aggressive and antisocial to fit back into civilian society.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Downes, p.81; *Souvenir of the New Zealand Kiwis Revue*, Publication, D810E8SOU, AWWM; War Diary for NZEU Crete, MS-Papers-6522-2, ATL.

⁷¹ Rex, p.22.

⁷² *Otago Daily Times*, 7 October 1943, p.6.

⁷³ Robin Hyde, *Passport to Hell*, London, 1936; John A. Lee, *Civilian into Soldier: A Novel of the Great War*, London, 1937; Phillips, pp.194–96.

⁷⁴ Deborah Montgomerie, 'Sweethearts, Soldiers, Happy Families: Gender and the Second World War', in Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie, eds, *The Gendered Kiwi*, Auckland, 1999, p.167.



Whereas the soldier who revelled in performing onstage represented the enduring significance of civilian values throughout the war, soldiers' appreciation of organisations like the concert parties illustrates the extent to which soldiers sought to hold on to comforting memories of home. As J.G. Fuller has highlighted, the World War I soldier concert parties were one of the institutions that soldiers took with them to help adjust to the new world into which they were thrust.⁷⁵ While historians have considered the importance of concert parties in maintaining morale for the wider war effort, the focus here is on their emotional value for soldiers.⁷⁶ Concert parties responded to the desire to maintain connections with a civilian society that many were reluctant to leave and desperate to return to. Recent years have seen historians draw on soldiers' personal correspondence with family in particular to argue that soldiers from both world wars sought to maintain a close connection with those at home.⁷⁷ This work has challenged arguments advanced by Eric Leed and Paul Fussell in the 1970s that highlighted the emotional separation and alienation soldiers felt from the civilian environment.⁷⁸

An examination of the how soldier concert parties sought to replicate forms of popular entertainment behind the front line provides an opportunity to make a significant contribution to this body of literature. As Michael Roper acknowledged, soldiers at war not only missed loved ones, but comforts of home such as beds, toilets, baths and good food.⁷⁹ Soldier concert parties responded to a similar impulse as they sought to bridge the gap between martial and civilian worlds, and provided a reminder of the public entertainment and leisure activities from home that were often sorely missed. Although nothing could recreate the public life men had enjoyed in New Zealand towns and cities, concert parties provided a glimpse of the social world they had left behind and the relationships that were formed outside of private family connections.

⁷⁵ Fuller, p.175.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.175; Downes, pp.49, 77.

⁷⁷ Martha Hanna, 'A Republic of Letters: The Epistolary Tradition in France During World War I', *American Historical Review*, 108, 5, 2003, p.1361; Ilana R. Bet-El, *Conscripts: Lost Legions of the Great War*, Stroud, 1999, pp.131–37; Montgomerie, *Love in Time of War*, p.134; Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War, Cultural History of Modern War*, Manchester; New York, 2009 p.33.

⁷⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, New York, 1975, pp.86–87; Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat & Identity in World War I*, Cambridge; New York, 1979, pp.188–89.

⁷⁹ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p.281.

Moreover, the concert parties brought back memories not only of entertainment soldiers would have enjoyed back in New Zealand, but also shows they saw on leave in London.⁸⁰

The standard portrayal of young men rushing to enlist upon the declaration of the Great War has reinforced the notion that New Zealand men were eager soldiers, raised to see war as a heroic adventure and an opportunity to prove their manliness.⁸¹ In doing so, New Zealand historians have followed the historiography of other Allied nations on the experience of mobilisation.⁸² There have been, however, a number of historians who have revealed a greater level of complexity in men's responses to mobilisation. Jock Phillips, for example, argued that male responses to the outbreak of war were more varied and ambivalent than the fabled rush to enlist suggests; a sense of obligation and no small amount of social pressure encouraged most men to see war as an 'acceptable risk'.⁸³ In recent years this view has come under even greater scrutiny. Jean-Jacques Becker's research on the reaction to the Great War on the French home front encouraged many historians to revise their own understanding of the history of mobilisation.⁸⁴ In an examination of the range of responses in Taranaki to the declaration of war, Graham Hucker further questioned the validity of this notion of a 'great wave of enthusiasm'. He argued that there was a variety of less enthusiastic responses and that the 'rush to enlist' was undertaken by only a small proportion of New Zealand military aged males, most of whom were young and single.⁸⁵

The suggestion that war was not met with widespread enthusiasm implies that the ideal of war as a heroic adventure did not resonate with all members of society. Many men saw military service as an obligation that was met with trepidation and fear.⁸⁶ The WWI Kiwis' Ernest McKinlay reflected this ambivalent response to war when he claimed he 'had never experienced any desire to be in the army' and that it was not

⁸⁰ *Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F.*, 13 June 1917; 30 August 1918.

⁸¹ See, for example, O.E. Burton, *The Silent Division: New Zealanders at the Front, 1914–1919*, Sydney, Australia, 1935, p.1; Christopher Pugsley, *Gallipoli: The New Zealand Story*, Auckland, 1984, p.32; Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, Auckland, 2003, p.85.

⁸² Graham Hucker, 'The Great Wave of Enthusiasm', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 43, 1, 2009, p.60.

⁸³ Phillips, pp.159–63.

⁸⁴ Hucker, p.57; Jean-Jacques Becker, "'That's the Death Knell for Our Boys'", in Patrick Fridenson, ed., *The French Home Front, 1914–1918*, Oxford, 1992, pp.17–36; Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present*, Cambridge, 2005, p.90.

⁸⁵ Hucker, p.71.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.66.

until the sinking of *Lusitania* in 1915 that he joined, since he figured 'sooner or later, everyone would be wanted'.⁸⁷ It was a sentiment held by other concert party performers as well. Fellow Kiwis performer George Lyttleton claimed he did not feel any enthusiasm for war; it was not until after Gallipoli when the names of people he knew started to appear on the casualty lists that he knew 'I had to enlist if I was to retain any peace of mind'.⁸⁸ McKinlay and Lyttleton did not expect the war to be a great adventure, nor did they relish the opportunity to prove their manhood. Both their accounts hint at the social pressure faced by those who were slow to volunteer. Furthermore, while neither would openly portray themselves as reluctant to join, their lack of enthusiasm to join the war effort not only demonstrates the diverse responses to the outbreak of war, but what was considered an acceptable response to mobilisation when these memoirs were written in the years following the war. In their memoirs, McKinlay and Lyttleton chose not to portray themselves as chivalric heroes, eager to prove their masculinity. Rather they saw themselves as civilian men, reluctantly forced to leave home and be sent to war.

As Robert Nye has highlighted, literature that examines soldiers' emotional connection to home has recast soldiers as reluctant warriors who clung to the memories and emotions of domestic life.⁸⁹ Correspondence with family provided an obvious connection with intimate family life, but by reminding soldiers of entertainment enjoyed away from the battlefield soldier concert parties evoked memories of the public life they had left behind. In some instances New Zealand concert parties included direct references to life in New Zealand, but more commonly it was the memory of peacetime pleasure that was recalled. For a reporter from the *Chronicle of the N.Z.E.F.*, a performance of the New Zealand Pierrots' revue *Eyes Front* brought to mind the very best shows he had seen in New Zealand.⁹⁰ McKinlay reflected on this potential for the concert party when he emphasized the value of the company in their ability to reconnect their audience with memories of happier times spent at home.⁹¹ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have argued that during the First World War, on the Western

⁸⁷ McKinlay, p.17.

⁸⁸ Lyttleton, p.1.

⁸⁹ Robert A Nye, 'Western Masculinities in War and Peace', *The American Historical Review*, 112, 2, 2007, p.431.

⁹⁰ Reprinted in *Kaipara and Waitemata Echo*, 2 October 1919, p.2.

⁹¹ McKinlay, p.92.

Front in particular, soldiers struggled to hold onto their pre-war selves as they increasingly saw their own lives as worthless and themselves as without agency.⁹² In the process, Gilbert and Gubar argued, the First World War 'virtually completed the Industrial Revolution's construction of the anonymous dehumanized man'.⁹³ Like letters and packages from home, concert parties responded to this sense of alienation by providing soldiers with reminders of the lives they had led before the war and one day hoped to return to.

For the performers themselves the concert parties also provided an opportunity to retain their passion for music and performance. Lyttleton treasured the opportunity to not only perform and play music throughout the war, but to be reunited with many of his friends from the Auckland entertainment circuit.⁹⁴ Not only that, but when touring concert parties such as the Canadian Maple Leaves performed for New Zealand soldiers Lyttleton used the occasion to meet and talk with them as fellow musicians, rather than soldiers.⁹⁵ Similarly, Oliver Foote saw his opportunity to spend time performing with the Tuis concert party as a chance to reconnect with his peacetime passion for music and performance.⁹⁶ While Foote's discharge papers listed his occupation as 'Clerk', in his pay book Foote described himself as a 'Vaudeville Artist'.⁹⁷ Foote clearly saw his passion for entertainment as an important part of his identity and valued the opportunity to maintain this connection through his involvement with the Tuis. As Ilana Bet-El has highlighted, soldiers sought to preserve the image of themselves as civilians; the memory of their life before the war provided sustenance as they struggled with the drudgery of military service.⁹⁸ Correspondence with home was one way soldiers could maintain this emotional connection with home, but there were others too. For performers such as Lyttleton and Foote their involvement in their respective concert parties fulfilled a similar role as it connected their objective as soldiers with their lives as civilians.

⁹²Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven, 1988, pp.259–63.

⁹³ Gilbert and Gubar, p.259.

⁹⁴ Lyttleton, p.28.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.130.

⁹⁶ Oliver Nelson Paul Foote, 1894?–1974?, Wartime Dairies, 2 January 1918, MSX-4334, ATL.

⁹⁷ Oliver Nelson Paul Foote, 1894?–1974?, Papers Relating to Army Life, MS-Paper-5627, ATL.

⁹⁸ Bet-El, p.134.

By responding to a widely held desire to connect with the pleasures of home, concert parties of the First World War reveal a more sentimental and nuanced view of home and domesticity among soldiers than is often acknowledged. Historians such as Jock Phillips and Stephen Garton have argued that during the war soldiers saw home as the place of women, domesticity and shirkers.⁹⁹ Phillips' and Garton's work dealt with fiction and memoirs, frequently written many years after the war had finished. Although veterans looking back on their wartime experiences may contrast any dissatisfaction with life at home with nostalgic memories of the masculine camaraderie of their unit, during the war soldier concert parties presented home as a site of pleasure and respite from the dangers and drudgery of war. The attitudes to home evident in concert parties, alongside other wartime practices such as letter writing and diary keeping, point towards a reluctance to leave home and desire for, and sometimes idealisation of, the comforts and pleasures of civilian society.

When the WWII Kiwi Concert Party was formed, the troupe's role in connecting audience with home and peacetime please became even more pronounced than it had been during the First World War. The Kiwis' shows adhered to a strict 'no khaki' policy; no military uniforms were worn onstage and no soldier jokes or references to military life were permitted.¹⁰⁰ As Terry Vaughan would later claim '[t]he point of the show was to get the troops away from the atmosphere of the army entirely, so we didn't mention it'.¹⁰¹ Vaughan made clear that the concert party's objective was to give their audiences 'a taste of civvy street' or 'something they might have taken the girlfriend to back home and, with luck, would again'.¹⁰² Despite this explicit desire to remind soldiers of home Vaughan stated 'we had no "longing-for-home" sentiments' and 'no nonsense about "New Zealand, the little Pacific Paradise"'.¹⁰³ Like their Great War counterparts the aim was not to directly draw on soldiers' lives back in New Zealand, but to recall entertainment they might have enjoyed away from war.

⁹⁹ Stephen Garton, 'Return Home: War, Masculinity and Repatriation', in Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake, eds, *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, 1995, pp.191–204; Phillips, p.213.

¹⁰⁰ *N.Z. Listener*, 13 August 1943, p.5; Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go*, p.23.

¹⁰¹ *Auckland Star*, 18 February 1984, section B, p.3.

¹⁰² Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go*, p.23.

¹⁰³ *N.Z. Listener*, 13 August 1943, p.5.

Terry Vaughan insisted that the Kiwis' popularity during the war was due, not only to their ability to provide a 'taste of civvy street', but also to their refusal to underestimate 'the taste of a modern soldier audience'. Vaughan believed that there was demand for entertainment that worked the gap between 'the usual army show fare' and the values he had developed at the Royal Academy of Music.¹⁰⁴ In his official history of the New Zealand Chaplains during the Second World War, M.L. Underhill claimed that soldiers repeatedly complained to the chaplains that British concert parties were 'substituting smut for humour'; reportedly 'the troops wanted humour, but again and again they told the chaplains they did not want bawdiness'.¹⁰⁵ Herbert Ross, a New Zealand soldier with the 20th Armoured Division expressed a similar sentiment. He too claimed New Zealand soldiers did not appreciate 'smutty English humour'.¹⁰⁶ Both Ross and Underhill praised the Kiwi Concert Party for providing an excellent alternative; their reluctance to rely on bawdy entertainment was seen as a sign of their 'real talent' and, apparently, appreciated by their soldier audience.¹⁰⁷

Naturally the Kiwis' respectable entertainment was not to everyone's tastes. Les Cleveland claimed that while military authorities promoted troupes like the Kiwis and similar 'musical slop', the songs that soldiers sang among themselves reflected more 'vulgar, ribald tastes'.¹⁰⁸ Vulgar songs were generally tolerated by military officials, but attempts were made to suppress more rebellious verse which demanded repatriation.¹⁰⁹ Cleveland presented this material as authentic folk music in opposition to the 'establishment propaganda' of the Kiwis, but Vaughan saw the two as complementary. Vaughan claimed soldiers could make their songs about the frustrations of service life; as stated earlier, the Kiwis' objective was to give them a taste of entertainment they might have enjoyed before the war.¹¹⁰ Like the soldiers' songs that demanded repatriation, the Kiwis' 'no khaki' approach responded to declining morale and a desire to be free from military service. Cleveland may have contrasted the

¹⁰⁴ *Revue No.1* programme, Cyril Pasco, Kiwi Concert Party, MS 2002/53, folder 2, Auckland War Memorial Museum (AWMM).

¹⁰⁵ M. L. Underhill, *New Zealand Chaplains in the Second World War*, Wellington, 1950, p.33.

¹⁰⁶ Herbert Cecil Lionel Ross, Interviewed by Brent Coutts, Thursday 8 December 2011. Brent Coutts personal collection. I am grateful to Brent for granting me access to this interview.

¹⁰⁷ Underhill, p.33.

¹⁰⁸ Les Cleveland, 'Remember', *N.Z. Listener*, 23 April 1973, p.11.

¹⁰⁹ Cleveland, 'Remember', p.11; Chris Bourke, *Blue Smoke: The Lost Dawn of New Zealand Popular Music, 1918-1964*, Auckland, 2010, pp.144-45.

¹¹⁰ Terry Vaughan, Interviewed by John Rohde, LC-1324, ATL.

two, and the Kiwis' approach was certainly more favoured by military officials, but the two forms of entertainment shared a similar sentiment.¹¹¹ The soldiers' song 'Won't You Take Me Home' expressed their frustration with the war by demanding that Prime Minister Peter Fraser let them return, whereas the Kiwis attempted to return their audience home in the realm of the imaginary as they provided a reminder of the world they had left behind.

Like the parcels soldiers received from home, concert parties clearly provided only temporary, and wholly inadequate, relief from the trials of military service. But their popularity illustrates how soldiers attempted to imaginatively reconnect with civilian society. As Deborah Montgomerie has argued, homesickness was culturally accepted among New Zealand soldiers during the Second World War. In letters home men described in great detail how and why they missed home; home was not only romanticized but 'became a shorthand for the frustrations of all service life'.¹¹² The singing and dancing of the concert party, like the sending and receiving of mail, responded to soldiers' desire to hold onto their connections with home; these links were a source of strength and support. Rather than the dichotomy that Phillips established between the 'man's man' of war and the domestic family man, concert parties illustrate how the desire for heroic adventure and homosocial camaraderie could fit comfortably with a yearning for the pleasures and comforts of civilian life. Moreover, in their attempt to give 'a taste of civvy street', the Kiwi Concert Party recalled the emotional appeal of not just the family home, but the public centres where men were free to socialize and enjoy themselves away from the dangers of war.



In the civilian tours that followed both world wars the soldier concert parties were presented as a celebration of soldier camaraderie and a reminder of the happier side of war. As these soldier performers took to the stage they presented an ideal of healthy and cheerful returned soldiers; the violence of war was sanitized and the problems of repatriation obscured. Whereas the wartime concert party performances gave their

¹¹¹ Cleveland, 'Remember', p.11.

¹¹² Deborah Montgomerie, *Love in Time of War*, p.134; Deborah Montgomerie, 'Anzac Anthems: New Zealand History and the Two World Wars', *University of Auckland Winter Lecture Series: Writing New Zealand History in the Twenty-First Century*, 2009, Special Collections, The University of Auckland Library.

audiences a reminder of peacetime pleasure and promoted the enduring importance of civilian values throughout the war, their post-war shows evoked a positive and reaffirming vision of military service. In this way concert parties continued to connect idealized images of domesticity and heroic masculinity. In the years that followed each war men were encouraged to settle down and were attracted to benefits of companionate marriage. Yet this did not mean men no longer held ambivalent feelings towards home and family. Institutions like the soldier concert parties appealed to these ambiguities as they provided a reminder of the positive attributes that were believed to have been gained through war, among a group who were promoted as happily responding to the challenges of repatriation.

Although Jock Phillips' claimed that after the First World War the ideal of the sentimental family became dominant, he acknowledged that this transition was neither sudden nor complete.¹¹³ The destruction and brutality of the First World War did provoke a shift in models of masculinity, but the popularity of soldier concert parties reflects a persistent public appetite for entertainment drawn from the experience and camaraderie of military service. When the Diggers first toured Australia the *Bulletin* claimed their success was 'thanks to the many people with a kindly feeling for all entertainers who have worn khaki'.¹¹⁴ The *Argus* may have noted that the Diggers 'wisely refrain from laying stress upon the war element', but their connection with the war was always acknowledged.¹¹⁵ Concert parties were part of a larger process that ensured the experience of World War I soldiers would be affectionately remembered by future generations and the ideals of military masculinity would remain culturally embedded. These concert parties, whose formation was seen as contradicting the ideal of the soldier at war, were now part of the process that ensured remnants of this myth stayed alive.

As First World War veterans returned home with severe, and often highly visible, injuries, civilians were confronted with the unprecedented level of violence the Great War produced. Sandy Callister's work on the photographic representation of severely wounded New Zealand soldiers has highlighted how new technology in cosmetic

¹¹³ Phillips, p242.

¹¹⁴ *Bulletin* (Sydney), 20 May 1920, p.34.

¹¹⁵ *Argus*, 19 July 1920, p.8.

surgery enabled the true violence of the war to be hidden; mutilated soldiers were transformed 'from being symbols of the horror of war to the acceptable category of 'war-wounded'.¹¹⁶ Work by Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker has also considered the ways in which the violence of the First World War was repressed in the years following the war. They argued that in the sculptures for war monuments the war was sanitized as soldiers appeared 'as clean and fresh as toy soldiers'.¹¹⁷ In a similar manner concert party performers appeared onstage fit and healthy, allowing the audience to forget that during the First World War the male body 'was intended to be mutilated'.¹¹⁸ By portraying veterans as healthy and well-adjusted, concert parties not only obscured the violence of war, but also glossed over the difficulties of repatriation.¹¹⁹

However, although the concert parties' performances obscured some of the difficulties of post-war repatriation, in other ways they were intimately involved in these concerns. Part of the impetus behind the Diggers' initial tour of New Zealand was to raise money for the Returned Soldiers' Fund.¹²⁰ Moreover, many of the concert party members became involved in the troupe due to difficulty finding work after the war.¹²¹ Reviews of the Diggers' early New Zealand performances urged readers to attend, as much out of duty as for the quality of the show. Reports initially emphasized the money they were raising to help struggling veterans, then once they became a commercial venture the focus was on the role the concert parties played during the war.¹²² The *Ohinemuri Gazette* reminded its readers: "'The Diggers" helped your boys over many a mile. Come see them'.¹²³ Pat Hanna's 'Chic and Joe' sketches with Joe Valli also provided some opportunities to explore some of the challenges returning veterans faced. While most sketches played with the emerging image of soldier larrikinism and emphasized

¹¹⁶ Sandy Callister, 'Broken Gargoyles': The Photographic Representation of Severely Wounded New Zealand Soldiers', *Social History of Medicine*, 20, 1, 2007, p.119.

¹¹⁷ Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, p.190.

¹¹⁸ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p.31.

¹¹⁹ The difficulties New Zealand returned soldiers faced has been examined in; Nicholas Boyack and Jane Tolerton, *In the Shadow of War: New Zealand Soldiers Talk About World War One and Their Lives*, Auckland, 1990, pp. 245–260; Russell Clarke, "'Not Mad, but Very Ill": The Treatment of New Zealand's Shellshocked Soldiers 1914 to 1939', MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1991.

¹²⁰ *Auckland Star*, 12 July 1919, p.3; Miscellaneous - NZEF Diggers concert party – Correspondence, AD 1 1045 65/233, Archives New Zealand, Wellington.

¹²¹ G.D. Bolton, *Warrior Entertainers: The Story of the 'Digger Pierrots' of the New Zealand Army in World War I*, Sydney, 1997. p.6.

¹²² *Auckland Star*, 12 July 1919, p.3.

¹²³ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 1 October 1920, p.2.

the importance of intimate relationships between soldiers, one sketch, 'Civvies', hinted at post-war tensions when Chic became jealous once Joe found a 'tabby', or girlfriend, whom he feared would come between them.¹²⁴

For the performers involved, concert parties most obviously provided a form of steady employment within the entertainment industry; however, the public reception of the performances also needs to be seen within the context of the war remembrance traditions that were being formed in response to the Great War. Concert parties were intimately involved in this process, but in a different way to the memorials and rituals that are frequently examined. In their guide to New Zealand war memorials, Chris McLean, Jock Phillips and Debbie Willis claimed that most ornaments drew upon familiar classical and religious iconography to articulate their sense of sorrow and pride.¹²⁵ This fits with Jay Winter's argument that across Europe the public evoked this classical and religious vocabulary to assist mourning as they attempted to comprehend the destruction of the war.¹²⁶ The reliance on familiar and accepted iconography evident in monuments responded to a desire to ensure their significance would be understood by future generations. Concert parties, however, drew on a different vocabulary to remember the war experience, with the emphasis on idealized male bonding and camaraderie rather than heroism and sacrifice. Instead of invoking traditional icons, concert parties responded to the changing tastes of their audience and were contingent on the public perception of soldiers in the immediate post-war period.¹²⁷ In this sense they contributed to what George L. Mosse has termed the 'trivialization of war': 'cutting war down to size so that it would become commonplace instead of awesome and frightening'.¹²⁸

Rather than associate wartime exploits with an ahistoric notion of the ideal soldier, the Diggers sought to express how soldiers coped with the trauma of their war experience. Richard Fotheringham presented soldier concert party performances as an

¹²⁴ Richard Fotheringham, 'Laughing It Off: Australian Stage Comedy after World War I', *History Australia*, 7, 1, 2010, p.7.

¹²⁵ Chris Maclean, Jock Phillips and Debbie Willis, *The Sorrow and the Pride: New Zealand War Memorials*, Wellington, 1990, p.76.

¹²⁶ J.M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge, 1995, p.223.

¹²⁷ Downes, p.59.

¹²⁸ George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, New York, 1990, p.126.

explicit act of communication to an audience of both returned soldiers and civilians.¹²⁹ By reframing laughter and entertainment as the central activity of war, concert parties such as the Diggers wanted to acknowledge the grief and horror of war, but also show it was still possible to laugh. As a member of the All Diggers Company — another soldier concert party touring Australia — explained, they wanted veterans to be able to say after seeing a performance; '[t]here you are. I have been trying to explain to you for weeks how we used to do it; now you see'.¹³⁰ Fotheringham claimed the Diggers were not afraid to acknowledge the destruction of war, but articulated a sense of social inclusiveness that 'invited audiences to join them in trying to laugh it off'.¹³¹ The Diggers' did not seek to make their war experience heroic but instead promoted another myth, that it was manageable and that through laughter, soldiers could deal with the trauma they had faced. Naturally, such an image was easier to develop after the war, when the audience knew that it had been won. But the enduring message was that the challenges of repatriation and the injuries soldiers had to live with were obstacles that could be overcome.

Like the Diggers before them, the Kiwis celebrated camaraderie and the soldiers' ability to cheerfully cope with the challenges of warfare, rather than the rhetoric of sacrifice and valour that dominated war memorials. Jonathan Bollen has even gone so far as to argue, with reference to their use of 1930s style entertainment, that the Kiwis 'might best be described as engaged in the task of forgetting the memory of the war, as a diversion from remembering the actuality of life during the war'.¹³² Certainly, the Kiwis were reluctant to draw too heavily on militaristic rhetoric. An early programme told the audience that apart from the opening where the Kiwis appeared in uniform 'to give the keynote of its origin', the Kiwis 'have no connection with the war or its memories'; while one reviewer claimed 'they do not come to us with any reminders of war: they come to us as the cream of their country showing the brighter, happier, better side of life'.¹³³

¹²⁹ Fotheringham, 'Laughing It Off', p.16.

¹³⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.15.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, p.10.

¹³² Jonathan Bollen, 'Remembering Masculinities in the Theatre of War', *Australasian Drama Studies*, 46, 2005, p.9.

¹³³ *Alamein* Programme, Terry Vaughan, 1915-1996, Papers, MS-Group-0042, ATL; *Barrier Daily Truth* (Broken Hill); 27 October 1927, n.p., Nola Miller, Papers relating to John Hunter and The Kiwis Revue, 77-244-6/16, ATL.



Figure 3.2: Promotional postcard for the Kiwis drawing on their wartime performances, D770 E8 Reserve, Auckland War Memorial Museum.

However, although the Kiwis' performances eschewed overt militarism, their connection with the war was discretely promoted. For their appearance in Wellington the attendance of Major-General Bernard Freyberg was noted and tied to his role in assisting their formation during the war; while the praise of 8th Army commander Bernard Montgomery was repeated in programmes and promotion.¹³⁴ The Kiwis may have banished military material from their performances during the war, but after the war they named their revues *Alamein*, *Tripoli*, *Benghazi* and *Cassino*, representing significant sites for the Allied campaign, and performed their opening chorus and the segment 'Songs of the Maori Battalion' in battledress.¹³⁵ Many newspapers responded favourably to this. The *Bulletin* claimed that when the Kiwis came out in uniform one was reminded 'that the turns have been played in the war-time desert, in Syria and

¹³⁴ Theatre - Kiwi Concert Party, Freida Dickens Programme Collection, George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries (GGSC); Concert Completion Certificates 1941–1943, MS Papers 6522-3, ATL.

¹³⁵ Their final revue *Now is the Hour* broke with this tradition. Vaughan, *Whistle As You Go*, pp.23, 71.

Greece and Crete, by men who have had their share of front-line service'.¹³⁶ Historians of theatre may see the emphasis on comedy and female impersonation as recalling pre-war variety shows, but the audience were also encouraged to see it as a continuation of entertainment put on for troops during the war.¹³⁷ Rather than helping audiences forget about the war, the Kiwis responded to a public desire for positive memories of war and presented the war experience as something which could be overcome and from which positive memories could be garnered.

The notion that during the 1940s and 1950s there was a 'crisis of masculinity' within those nations that fought in the Second World War has received significant historiographical attention in recent years.¹³⁸ Stephen Garton has examined how Australian veterans, many of whom were embittered, wounded and psychologically damaged by the war, struggled to reintegrate into a society where many felt their contribution during the war was not recognized.¹³⁹ Furthermore, the majority of Australian servicemen whose war experience was either in support roles, at home, or as prisoners of war, struggled to connect their war experience with the Anzac legend.¹⁴⁰ For historians such as Jock Phillips and Leo Braudy, the central tension concerned the transition from the military world of men to a civilian society that was imagined as dominated by women.¹⁴¹ Braudy has argued that veterans' struggles to re-enter civilian society were reflected in the rise of the American western and detective films, alongside Japanese samurai films, and their valorisation of the solitary heroic individual, un beholden to women, and rallying against the perceived injustices of a cruel and uncaring society.¹⁴²

The Kiwis presented an alternative to the escapism of Hollywood westerns and detective films. They reassured their audiences that effective reintegration was

¹³⁶ *Bulletin*, 30 November 1949, p.35.

¹³⁷ *Souvenir of the New Zealand Kiwis Revue*, Publication, D810.E8 SOU, AWMM.

¹³⁸ A short list includes, Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany*, Princeton, 2006; Chris Brickell, 'Soldier to Civilian: Army Education and Postwar New Zealand Citizenship', *History of Education*, 39, 3, 2010, pp.363–82; Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*, New York, 1989, pp.268–85; Stephen Garton, 'Fit Only for the Scrap Heap': Rebuilding Returned Soldier Manhood in Australia after 1945', *Gender & History*, 20, 1, 2008, pp.48–67; Alison Parr, *Silent Casualties: New Zealand's Unspoken Legacy of the Second World War*, North Shore, 1995.

¹³⁹ Garton, *The Cost of War*, passim.

¹⁴⁰ Garton, 'Fit Only for the Scrap Heap', p.62.

¹⁴¹ Phillips, p.213; Braudy, p.499.

¹⁴² Braudy, pp. 497–99.

possible. Much was made of the fraternity and spirit of co-operation that existed among the troupe. Vaughan claimed that rather than relying on individual stars, the Kiwis' shows were centred on ensemble pieces and the talents of all members of the troupe.¹⁴³ Furthermore, the Kiwis adhered to a strict 'no-star' policy in which all members drew the same salary and no performer's contribution was valued over others.¹⁴⁴ While the co-operative nature of the group highlighted the positive attributes that they were believed to have developed during the war, in their lives offstage the individual performers were presented as happily accepting the demands on the present day civilian. As their shows continued into the 1950s, reports praised the concert party performers' transition from bachelors to family men. On their return to New Zealand in 1951 one paper commented, '[t]he years have brought changes and the gay young blades who rallied round leader Terry Vaughan in the desert entertainment days of 1941... are now responsible married men'.¹⁴⁵ As noted at the outset of this chapter, Australian newspapers reported on the marriage of each Kiwi with approval and highlighted the growing number of wives and children who travelled to Australia with the troupe.¹⁴⁶ By recapturing their experiences of war that were deemed to be positive as they settled down to live respectable domestic lives, the Kiwis sold reassurance to their audience; demonstrating how men could reconcile their potentially contradictory identities as soldiers and civilians.¹⁴⁷

Through reconciling the perceived contradictions of the demands on the modern family man and the enduring masculine ideal based on adventure and homosocial camaraderie, the Kiwi Concert Party presented an idealized, and largely impossible, compromise. If the public were reassured by this sanitized image of military service and repatriation, the effects of this overly optimistic portrayal of military life on military veterans was both more problematic and more ambiguous. Alison Parr, who examined the distress and pain felt by New Zealand World War II veterans, argued that many soldiers' difficulty in re-adapting to civilian life was influenced by the sense that their

¹⁴³ Tony Rex, "Kiwis": The Story of Kiwi Concert Party, October 1940 to January 1954, Unpublished Manuscript, p.98, MS 1624, AWWM.

¹⁴⁴ *Sunday Herald* (Sydney), 13 April 1952, p.10.

¹⁴⁵ "'Kiwis' Start Home-Circuit', Undated and unattributed newspaper clipping, Ralph Dyer, fl 1947–1991, Clippings on the Kiwi Concert Party, MS-Papers-5582, ATL.

¹⁴⁶ *Sunday Herald*, 12 April 1952, p.10; *Argus*, 5 February 1953, p.18; 7 February 1953 p.5; 10 April 1953, p.3.

¹⁴⁷ Montgomerie, 'Sweethearts, Soldiers, Happy Families, p.167.

military service did not conform to the public image of the New Zealand soldier and that no one could comprehend their experience.¹⁴⁸ The Kiwis presented war as an experience from which lessons were learnt, skills developed and friends made. The Kiwis were popular among veterans, but not all returned servicemen would have been able to recognize their own experience in the Kiwis' portrayal of war.



By the early 1950s the Kiwis were expected to reconcile their identities as both returned soldiers and settled family men. Whereas in the late nineteenth century bachelor heroes such as Cecil Rhodes embodied an ideal of manliness based on homosocial adventure and a life un beholden to women, by the mid-twentieth century men were expected to take up their role as breadwinner and become responsible fathers and husbands.¹⁴⁹ As the Kiwis married and started families they were presented as entering a new phase of manhood, perhaps their most significant since joining the army. This sublimation of masculinist fantasy in order to be compatible with men's attraction to marriage, fatherhood and secure employment can be seen as part of a broader shift away from a notion of Victorian chivalric manliness, or ideals of the pioneer man in settler societies, towards more temperate models of masculinities that recognized the plurality of identities. As Martin Francis argued, the 'flight from commitment' that occurred in the late 1940s and 1950s, unlike the Victorian 'flight from domesticity', predominately took place in 'the realm of the fantasised and the imagined'.¹⁵⁰ This shift follows the basic thrust of the 'domestication' narrative that chivalric notions of masculinity were gradually eroded during the first half of the twentieth century; however, as the concert parties of the two world wars reveal such a shift was neither complete nor linear. Instead they point towards a longer tradition of men reconciling the simultaneous yearning for both masculine adventure and domestic comfort.

Across both world wars part of the concert parties' appeal was their ability to act as intermediaries between civilian and martial worlds. During the war they provided soldiers with a reminder of public life they had left behind and were seen to embody the

¹⁴⁸ Parr, p.84.

¹⁴⁹ Francis, 'Domestication of the Male?', p.644.

¹⁵⁰ Francis, 'A Flight from Commitment?', p.181.

enduring importance of civilian values as many soldiers were required to suffer and perform inhumane acts. After the war the concert party performers recalled sanitized memories of militaristic adventure and camaraderie that could be found at war, while promoting an ideal of effective repatriation. In both instances they sent a reassuring message to their audience, that society could cope with the obstacles they faced at war. In the process, however, they obscured the violent and destructive reality of war and the damaging effects it had on soldiers' lives.

John Tosh's claim that historians seeking to construct a history of masculinity need to look outside all-male formations has encouraged historians to examine men's lives in relation to women as well as their identities as lovers, husbands and fathers.¹⁵¹ Subsequent work on masculinities has garnered new insights into power relations between men and women and men's frequently ambivalent attitudes towards domesticity and more restrictive notions of manliness. However, even within a homosocial formation such as the soldier concert party, individuals were still blurring the boundary between martial and domestic worlds. Even before soldier concert parties started performing for significant numbers of women in their civilian tours, femininity and women held an important place in the imaginary of the performers and their soldier audience. Stephen Garton and Jock Phillips were right in arguing that soldiers imagined home as feminine; however, soldiers' response to this femininity was not simply one of antagonism.¹⁵² The portrayals of home evident in the concert parties highlight the support and pleasure soldiers drew from such memories. Soldiers also drew strength and amusement from perhaps the most obvious portrayals of femininity: the female impersonators. These performers were the undoubted stars of the shows during both the First and Second World Wars and are the focus of the following chapter.

¹⁵¹ John Tosh, 'What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 38, 1994, pp.179–202.

¹⁵² Phillips, p.213; Garton, 'Return Home', p.191.

Chapter Three

'Mis-leading Ladies':

Maintaining Respectability with Female Impersonation

While the flurry of newspaper articles on the marriages of the Kiwis Revue Company performers celebrated their transition from soldiers to respectable family men, the story on the marriage of Maurice Tansley ended with an enigmatic retraction. When the *Argus* claimed Tansley had 'forfeited his title as the last bachelor of the Kiwi company', the Kiwis' performer insisted the claim was not entirely accurate since, '[t]he girls ... er ... the four female impersonators are still bachelors'.¹ Yet the *Argus* insisted on labelling Tansley as 'the last bachelor' despite this obvious contradiction. Although the *Argus* was enthusiastic in its promotion of the Kiwis as respectable family men, the female impersonators were clearly not expected to follow the same path towards domesticity as their fellow performers. Crucially, though, this was considered in a casual, humorous fashion; it did not prevent the newspaper from praising the Kiwis' drag routines and promoting the female impersonators as talented, professional performers. This exchange gives some insight into the uncertain place the female impersonators held within the concert party and their audience's imagination. Despite their obvious value and prominent place within the Kiwis, they were differentiated from the other performers in subtle ways.

From the formation of soldier concert parties in the early years of the First World War through to the Kiwi Concert Party's civilian tours after World War II, the troupes' female impersonators were regularly seen as the stars of each company and a necessary ingredient to any successful revue.² However, although their popularity remained constant, the nature of the drag routines and the ways they were interpreted changed over time. When the WWI Kiwis' star female impersonator Stuart Nelson was praised for his performance, viewers emphasized characteristics such as his shapely figure and naturally 'feminine' voice that made him ideal for the role.³ Moreover, although performers such as Nelson drew on a newly emerging tradition of 'glamour

¹ *Argus* (Melbourne), 10 April 1953, p.3.

² *Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F.*, 5 July 1918, p.248.

³ Ernest McKinlay, *Ways and by-Ways of a Singing Kiwi: With the N.Z. Divisional Entertainers in France*, Dunedin, 1939, pp.90-91.

drag' that sought to produce an alluring and convincing vision of femininity, these routines were performed alongside drag routines that were based on the comic 'old dame' tradition, a throwback from the nineteenth century in which male comedians would play with an absurd and grotesque vision of femininity.⁴

When the Kiwis re-established the concert party tradition during World War II performers such as Wally Pricor and Phil Jay revived the role played by the glamorous female impersonators from the First World War. However, by the Second World War performances in the 'old dame' style were considered bad taste, and while female impersonators were not averse to including humour in their routines, most were firmly in the 'glamour drag' tradition. Yet, although these 'femmes' may have followed the style of performers like Stuart Nelson, there were subtle, but significant, changes in the promotion and reception of the routines. By the Second World War, rather than highlighting the physical characteristics that made these men suitable for women's roles, the Kiwis' promotion and reviews presented their convincing portrayals of femininity as reflecting their skills as professional performers.⁵ In this way the drag performers were understood to have undergone a 'transformation', as their ordinarily masculine identities were transformed as they became 'women' onstage.⁶ By presenting their performances as a spectacle for the duration of the show, the Kiwis' drag routines were separated from the mundane everyday behaviour through which gender is ordinarily reproduced.

Through considering how the female impersonators were promoted, their place within the concert parties and how audiences interpreted their routines, this chapter will explore how these performances intersected with contemporary concerns regarding gender and sexuality. Drag performers were able to hint at illicit transgressions, but ensure their routines remained within the bounds of respectable entertainment. The sense of fascination and coded unease that surrounded the female impersonators was tied to the sense that they could present what Marjorie Garber has called a third 'mode of articulation', that is, a performance 'that challenges the possibility of harmonious and stable binary symmetry'.⁷ The threat was not that these

⁴ Peter Downes, *Top of the Bill: Entertainers through the Years*, Wellington, 1979, p.53.

⁵ *Press* (Christchurch), 4 December 1950, p.3; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 February 1949, p.5.

⁶ *Evening Post* (Wellington), 7 September 1950, p.10.

⁷ Marjorie B. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*, New York, 1992, p.12.

individuals might perform the wrong gender, but that they might perform gender wrong. Those promoting the Kiwis guarded against this fear when they sought to portray the impersonators as presenting an accurate portrayal of femininity onstage, yet suitably masculine offstage. Audiences may have marvelled at the female impersonators' convincing and alluring representations of femininity, but there was little doubt that their offstage masculinity was their 'true' identity. Crucially, these measures that were central to the respectability of the WWII Kiwis' performances were largely absent in the drag routines from the First World War. Comparing the performances from the two wars highlights the historically contingent nature of cross-dressing, something that is lost in Garber's theoretical framework in which cross-dressers are universalized as 'the figure that disrupts'.⁸

In the majority of the literature on New Zealand soldier concert parties the female impersonators have been presented as a necessity, required to meet soldiers' desire for some 'feminine element' in the absence of 'real' women.⁹ Ernest McKinlay and George Lyttleton, both members of the WWI Kiwis, included praise for Stuart Nelson's performances in their memoirs, but the need for female impersonators was taken for granted and, therefore, not explored.¹⁰ Those who have written on the Kiwi Concert Party of the Second World War, however, felt the need to explain and justify the inclusion of female impersonators in the company. Terry Vaughan, the concert party's leader for most of their career, for example, repeatedly stressed that women could not have coped with their responsibilities as a military unit.¹¹ Therefore, the Kiwis' decision not to include women was justified through a judgment of what was considered gender appropriate military service. This rationale for the exclusion of women has been reiterated by most of those who have written on the concert parties of the Second World War and, therefore, led these authors to not consider the use of female impersonators as worthy of further analysis.¹² Matt Elliott's history of 'Kiwi Jokers'

⁸ Garber, pp.102–03; Anne McClintok, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, New York, 1995, pp.67, 175.

⁹ Downes, p.77; Terry Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go: The Story of the Kiwi Concert Party and Terry Vaughan*, Auckland, 1995, p.77.

¹⁰ McKinlay, pp.70, 90; George Clyne Lyttleton, 'Pierrots in Picardy: a khaki chronicle, by one of them', Unpublished Manuscript, p.48, MS242, Auckland War Memorial Museum (AWMM).

¹¹ Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go*, p.77; Tony Rex, "Kiwis": The Story of Kiwi Concert Party, October 1940 to January 1954, Unpublished Manuscript, p.98, MS 1624, AWMM.

¹² Downes, p.77; Chris Bourke, *Blue Smoke: The Lost Dawn of New Zealand Popular Music, 1918–1964*, Auckland, 2010, p.140.

followed this lead; he claimed the Kiwi Concert Party included men playing women's roles 'for obvious reasons'.¹³

Recent work by Chris Brickell, however, has departed from earlier interpretations. Brickell worked the drag performances into a narrative charting the greater visibility of queer identities in New Zealand culture.¹⁴ Brickell argued that 'most of the femmes, and some of their co-performers, drew upon — and then fed back into — the expanding homoerotic cultures to which they belonged' as they 'melded together the erotic realm of homosexual life and the popular world of entertainment'.¹⁵ According to Brickell, the Kiwis enabled these gay performers to publicly exhibit a queer sensibility while 'homosexual men in the audiences enjoyed the queer elements bubbling away behind the façade of straight theatricality'.¹⁶ Brickell also argued that the female impersonators were accepted and queer interpretations were suppressed because the performances evoked more powerful motifs, such as the glory of nationhood and empire, and the professionalism of a hard-working performer doing his job.¹⁷ Brickell's work highlights the female impersonators' intimate connection with expanding homoerotic communities, but by examining the routines within a broader context this chapter seeks to use these performances to consider wider questions regarding attitudes towards gender, the body and sexuality in New Zealand and Australian history.

Brickell's claim that those who interpreted the drag performances in its 'queerest sense' detected their 'hidden reality' implies that those who read the shows in other ways misinterpreted them.¹⁸ Some audience members surely would have revelled in a queer reading of the performances, yet the female impersonators' popularity was widespread. Presenting the Kiwis' drag performances as 'belonging' to expanding homoerotic subcultures and the expression of a 'queer sensibility' ignores the diverse range of interpretations the Kiwis' drag routines provoked. Appeals to professionalism and nationalism may have reassured audiences that they were enjoying respectable entertainment, but it does not explain why audiences applauded the sight of men

¹³ Matt Elliott, *Kiwi Jokers: The Rise and Rise of New Zealand Comedy*, Auckland, 1997, p.6.

¹⁴ Chris Brickell, *Mates & Lovers: A History of Gay New Zealand*, Auckland, 2008, pp.183–92.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp.189–92.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.192.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.189.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.189.

performing women's roles, regardless of whether or not they identified the connotative queer subtext. The female impersonators were more than just tolerated by their 'square' audience, they were regularly praised as the stars of the show. Moreover, as the *Argus's* report on Tansley's wedding suggests, many detected the drag routines' homoerotic subtext.

Furthermore, by reconfiguring the routines to be understood as 'camp' or 'queer' Brickell overlooked the contradictory ways in which the routines both worked within and against these labels. The terms 'camp' and 'queer' are associated with forms of cultural resistance that subvert received notions of 'natural' gender or sexuality; the use of these labels encourages readers to ignore the extent to which these routines reinforced, rather than problematized, accepted gender norms. While some audience members may have identified the female impersonators' performances as appealing to the sensibilities of newly emerging homoerotic subcultures, evidence from reviews and reports suggests that part of what made the routines so popular was that they worked with, rather than challenged, hegemonic notions of gender. One reviewer credited the female impersonators with allowing the Kiwis to conduct a 'masculine war of independence' and commented favourably that Ralph Dyer 'resists the temptation to burlesque' and by producing a convincing portrayal of femininity 'maintains the Kiwi tradition of impersonation, rather than travesty'.¹⁹ Performers were careful not to blur the boundaries between portrayals of masculinity and femininity, while their very existence was tied to the desire to maintain the heteronormative structure of sketches and romantic duets.

Through their use and promotion of female impersonators, the New Zealand concert parties from the First World War largely followed the conventions established by other concert parties within the Allied forces, where female impersonators were almost universally popular.²⁰ Laurel Halladay claimed that part of the appeal of the female impersonators during the First World War and early years of the Second World War was that they maintained the homosociability of the battlefield. That is, the presence of 'real' women may have threatened the masculine nature of military

¹⁹ Undated and unattributed clipping, Nola Miller, Papers relating to John Hunter and The Kiwis Revue, 77-244-6/16, ATL.

²⁰ J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*, Oxford, 1991, p.106.

service.²¹ Within the homosocial environment, J.G. Fuller argued, soldiers interpreted the female impersonators as 'surrogate women'; their attraction was due to the emphasis on glamour and luxury, something he claimed was absent from local women and presented a contrast from the squalor of war.²² However, in David Boxwell's revision of Fuller's 'surrogate woman' framework he claimed that due to the prevalence of civilian arrests of men dressed in women's clothing by the time of the First World War, cross-dressing in Britain could not be divorced from 'sexual perversity'. Therefore, the performances' comedic and erotic appeal was informed by its cultural association with illicit homoerotic desire.²³ Although these two interpretations are largely incompatible, they could potentially co-exist as alternate positions that audiences could take in the response to the performances.

If the lack of 'real' women in the First World War was seen to necessitate impersonation, the greater involvement of women in the military during the Second World War presented a significant challenge to the status of female impersonators. The Kiwi Concert Party stuck with the all-male, all-soldier wartime concert party format established during World War I, but women began to play greater roles in soldier entertainment organized by other nations. Over the course of World War II the British Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA), the United Service Organisations (USO), the Canadian Army Show (CAS) and the Australian Army Amenities Service all included women in their entertainment for the troops.²⁴ Although Halladay detected some initial concern that women may disrupt the masculine nature of military service, she claimed that once female performers were introduced they proved to be overwhelmingly popular. Halladay argued this provoked a shift in the way Canadian soldiers interpreted the female impersonation's routines as the ideological links between cross-dressing and homosexuality were quickly entrenched.²⁵ Subsequent use of female impersonators was seen as passé and performers faced suggestions of 'sexual

²¹ Laurel Halladay, 'A Lovely War: Male to Female Cross-Dressing and Canadian Military Entertainment in World War II', in Steven P. Schacht and Lisa Underwood, eds, *The Drag Queen Anthology: The Absolutely Fabulous but Flawlessly Customary World of Female Impersonators*, New York, 2004, p.24.

²² Fuller, p.106.

²³ Boxwell, p.12.

²⁴ Richard Fawkes, *Fighting for a Laugh: Entertaining the British and American Armed Forces 1939-1946*, London, 1978, p.24, and passim; Michael Pate, *An Entertaining War*, Sydney, 1986, p.12; Halladay, 'A Lovely War', p.28.

²⁵ Halladay, 'A Lovely War', p.29.

deviancy' before being removed from productions.²⁶ In his account of the experience of gay men and women during the Second World War, Allan Bérubé argued that the introduction of female performers in American military entertainment had a similar effect. Before female entertainers were employed military officials and the press had supported female impersonators, assuring audiences they were masculine soldiers ready to serve their country.²⁷ However, once women were included in such entertainment this positive promotion evaporated and female impersonators were linked with effeminacy and homosexuality.²⁸ These developments suggest a more complex relationship between female impersonators and 'real' women than either the 'surrogate women' thesis or Boxwell's argument suggests. Some in the audiences may have revelled in gazing at a feminine or effeminate acting male, but the absence of women provided the justification for this desire and once 'real' women were employed female impersonators were under threat.

Whereas historians such as Halladay, Fuller and Bérubé have examined the drag routines' place within the dynamics of the military environment, soldier concert parties have also featured prominently in many histories of drag performance and are seen to have played a vital role in developing the image of the glamorous female impersonator. The First World War came near the end of what has commonly been seen as a 'golden age' of female impersonation.²⁹ In America, from the turn of the century through to the 1920s, glamorous performers emerged from the vaudeville stage and often featured in musical comedies and, later, in films.³⁰ In Britain female impersonators were a regular feature on the music hall or pantomime stage and male comedians had long played the role of the 'old dame'.³¹ Moreover, female impersonation had not been limited to America and Britain; such routines frequently appeared in theatrical entertainment in New Zealand and Australia.³² Precedents such as the theatrical groups at all-male

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.30.

²⁷ Allan Bérubé, *Coming out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two*, New York, 1990, p.68.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.95.

²⁹ Bérubé, p.73; Senelick, p.305; Sharon R. Ullman, "'The Twentieth Century Way': Female Impersonation and Sexual Practice in Turn-of-the-Century America', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 5, 4, 1995, p.577.

³⁰ Ullman, pp.577–80.

³¹ Roger Baker, *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts*, New York, 1994, p.172; Michael F. Moore, *Drag!: Male and Female Impersonators on Stage, Screen and Television*, North Carolina, 1994, p.31.

³² Brickell, *Mates & Lovers*, pp.64–66; Lucy Chesser, 'More Playful Than Anxious: Crossdressing, Sex-Impersonation and the Colonial Stage', *Australasian Drama Studies*, 52, 2008, pp.148–64.

schools in Britain or the wench role in American minstrel theatre had conditioned the public to accept female impersonation on the variety stage, but the glamorous female impersonation that developed in the second half of the nineteenth century did not simply emerge from these traditions. As Laurence Senelick has demonstrated, analyses that present the growth of female impersonation as a natural evolution from these earlier models of popular entertainment obscure the genre's connection with newly conspicuous homoerotic subcultures that influenced the norms of popular entertainment.³³

From around 1850 phrases such as 'to go on the drag' or 'flash the drag' gained currency as slang, referring to those who wore female clothing to attract other men.³⁴ In order for female impersonation to be seen as respectable entertainment it was necessary to obscure these transgressive origins and its homoerotic subtext. It was, however, an association that proved difficult to ignore; drag could win acclaim on the stage, but it still brought prosecution on the street. In 1870 Ernest Boulton and Frederick William Park, two actors with respectable backgrounds, were tried for the catch-all crime of offending 'public decency' after openly, and repeatedly, parading around London's West End in women's clothing.³⁵ The prosecution tried to show that the two worked as prostitutes, but after a robust defence Boulton and Park were acquitted; the prosecution could not attach their acts to a specific crime.³⁶ The case attracted immense public attention, suggesting cross-dressing around the West End was still a novel sight.³⁷ It also contributed towards a developing consensus about effeminate behaviour; the prosecution sought to connect the couple's appearance in drag and the affectionate terms used in their correspondence with same-sex desire.³⁸ Furthermore, while Boulton and Park's claim that their use of women's clothing was for theatrical purposes excused their case before the courts, it highlighted the potential dangers men faced when they took their cross-dressing from the stage to the street and

³³ Laurence Senelick, 'Boys and Girls Together: Subcultural Origins of Glamour Drag and Male Impersonation on the Nineteenth-Century Stage', in Lesley Ferris, ed., *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, London, 1993, p.85.

³⁴ Senelick, *The Changing Room*, p.302.

³⁵ Morris B. Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in Wilde Times*, Ithaca, 2005, p.22.

³⁶ Harry Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century*, *Social and Cultural History Today*, London, 2003, p.114.

³⁷ Kaplan, p.23.

³⁸ Cocks, p.107; Senelick, *The Changing Room*, p.302.

tested boundaries between public display and private desire.³⁹ The case was widely reported in New Zealand, with newspapers hinting at the link between cross-dressing and homoeroticism.⁴⁰ Moreover, as Brickell has suggested, although New Zealand's smaller population may have prevented the development of homoerotic subcultures similar to those present in London, it was possible that smaller groups or individuals could identify the homoerotic resonance of incidents like the Boulton and Park case and its connection with one's own practices or desires.⁴¹

Despite the strengthening cultural association between cross-dressing and same-sex desire, glamorous female impersonation continued to grow in popularity in British and American entertainment into the twentieth century. However, female impersonators had to ensure they projected a respectable image if they were to find commercial success, an impulse most evident in the career of Julian Eltinge. Eltinge was America's most popular female impersonator in the years before the First World War, his success due to both his skill as a performer and the respectable public image he maintained.⁴² Eltinge was not only a star of the vaudeville circuit; his *Julian Eltinge Magazine* offered beauty tips to readers and promoted his line of cosmetics, corsets and shoes.⁴³ Eltinge's magazine and other promotional material emphasized his popularity among women, rather than the potentially troubling prospect that men might find him attractive. Whereas Eltinge appeared as a perfect model of femininity onstage, offstage his masculine nature was accentuated, not just to give all women hope - if a large, burly man could become an attractive lady anyone could - but also in an attempt to deflect allegations of effeminacy. Eltinge frequently expressed his disdain for 'this sort of act', insisting he was doing it 'merely for the money'.⁴⁴ Furthermore, unlike fellow female impersonator Bothwell Browne, who provoked criticism for his sexualized caricatures of femininity, Eltinge was never placed within a plot as a figure of desire.⁴⁵ However,

³⁹ Kaplan, pp.91, 101.

⁴⁰ *West Coast Times*, 21 July 1870, p.3; *Auckland Star*, 16 August 1870, p.2; *Wellington Independent*, 16 August 1870, p.3; *North Otago Times*, 25 October 1870, p.5.

⁴¹ Brickell, *Mates & Lovers*, pp.67-68; Chris Brickell, 'Visualizing Homoeroticism: The Photographs of Robert Gant, 1887-1892', *Visual Anthropology*, 23, 2, 2010, p.153.

⁴² Ullman, p.581.

⁴³ Senelick, *The Changing Room*, pp.307-15.

⁴⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.311.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.316; Ullman, p.589.

despite these measures he was never above suspicion and regardless of his popularity doubts concerning his respectability persisted.⁴⁶

In the drag performances that became a central feature of the World War I concert parties, the traditions that had been developed over the previous decades were transposed to a new context. Significantly, in this new environment the shows' erotic appeal was often openly acknowledged. Fuller registered his disbelief that a concert party audience member would claim the female impersonators encouraged 'an upsurge of amorous feeling'.⁴⁷ While Fuller's surprise was grounded on his own reaction to photographs of the performers, what is more remarkable is that these 'amorous feelings' were frankly discussed. In some instances soldiers appeared to have shown little reluctance in expressing their desire for their fellow soldiers. As one officer described it, each 'man in the audience was fascinated, filled with longing, stirred with lust which made him shout or grin or hide his facial feelings according to the experiences, or lack, of his body'.⁴⁸ In a similar manner, the descriptions of shapely figure and 'naturally feminine' characteristics of New Zealand performers such as Stuart Nelson and Stan Lawson reveal a willingness to reflect on the attractiveness of the female impersonators.

By the 1930s, however, drag performance had gone underground as attacks on 'effeminacy' increased and attempts were made to clean up the entertainment industry.⁴⁹ Commentators had long sought to establish a clear relationship between sexual practice and gender definition. Figures such as Bothwell Browne were stigmatized as effeminate and degenerate as early as 1913.⁵⁰ As the public concern surrounding homosexuality grew, performers such as Julian Eltinge lost their star status and moved to performing in less glamorous nightclubs.⁵¹ When troupes like the Kiwi Concert Party revived the concert party tradition during the Second World War those who performed in drag needed to distinguish their routines from the disreputable image female impersonation had acquired. The decline in popularity and respectability of British revues such as *Soldiers in Skirts* partly stemmed from a failure to maintain

⁴⁶ Senelick, *The Changing Room*, p.311.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Fuller, p.106.

⁴⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.105.

⁴⁹ Bérubé p.73.

⁵⁰ Ullman, p.589.

⁵¹ Bérubé, p.73.

this image as their connection with the war faded and the drag routines increasingly dominated the shows.⁵² As the Kiwis' presented their drag routines as tasteful and professional entertainment they employed many of the techniques Eltinge had used to counter doubts about the shows' respectability. Both during and after the war, the Kiwis' female impersonators publically portrayed themselves as masculine professionals, emphasising the necessity of their performances, and asserting their manliness offstage. These assertions were, however, frequently half-hearted. The Kiwis may have provided reassurance for those who sought it, but as the entertainers themselves became popular favourites within emerging homoerotic communities they also allowed space for a queer reading of their performances.⁵³

As a more coherent public discourse around homosexuality developed by the Second World War, the Kiwis were more concerned with any connections that may be formed between cross-dressing and same-sex desire. Ultimately, however, the extent to which viewers would have seen the performances as reasserting or undermining the gender binary would have been dependent on the thoughts and desires they brought to the show. The popularity of the WWII Kiwis' female impersonators may have mirrored that of their Great War counterparts, but there were significant changes in how their routines were promoted and interpreted. Whereas analyses that focus excessively on drag's subversive potential to reveal the performative nature of gender can obscure the extent to which each performance is tied to its historical context, female impersonation in 1954, when the Kiwis performed their last show, was clearly not viewed the same way as it had been when Stuart Nelson was entertaining soldiers during the First World War.



During the First World War, Stuart Nelson was the Kiwis' foremost 'girl' and one of the stars of the troupe.⁵⁴ Nelson's popular revue and music hall songs and duets with Ernest McKinlay were crowd favourites, usually requiring him to take two or three encores.⁵⁵ McKinlay later stated that 'Nelly' had a light tenor voice that, coming 'from such a

⁵² Roger Baker, *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts*, New York, 1994, pp.196–97.

⁵³ Brickell, *Mates & Lovers*, p.192.

⁵⁴ McKinlay, p.70.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.70.

charming example of femininity', could be taken for a contralto.⁵⁶ Nelson's slight figure made him especially suited to the role; fellow Kiwis performer George Lyttleton claimed that 'with wig and make up [Nelson] could be made distinctly pretty, his legs were shapely, ankles neat and, with judicious padding, his figure attractive'.⁵⁷ Nelson was not, however, the only New Zealander to impress audiences with his drag routine. Even Lyttleton recognized that Stan Lawson, the New Zealand Pierrots' leading 'girl', had the talent and 'beauty' to match Nelson.⁵⁸ During the war, performers such as Nelson and Lawson were considered necessary ingredients to any successful concert party. In a profile on the Tuis concert party the *Chronicle of the N.Z.E.F.* claimed, 'with the addition of a "girl" to the company' they could now 'hold their own with the best in the entertaining line in France'.⁵⁹ Without such a performer most troupes were seen to be incomplete.

The concert parties of the First World War were performing at a time when female impersonation was still a recognisable convention on the popular stage. Although not all the soldiers would have seen performers like Nelson or Lawson before, they could connect them with figures that were familiar onstage in Australia and New Zealand throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁶⁰ Moreover, whereas performers such as Julian Eltinge who made a career out of female impersonation had to defend their reputation, in the carnivalesque context of the soldier concert party this sort of gender disruption was largely unproblematic. Lawson continued to perform in drag with the Diggers' post-war tours. Dubbed the 'mis-leading lady', his performances were so effective he was said to have 'defied detection'.⁶¹ As women gradually joined the Diggers, however, Lawson began to perform in men's roles as well.⁶² Lawson went on to develop a career in popular theatre, his ability as a female impersonator just one skill in his repertoire as a comic performer.⁶³

⁵⁶ McKinlay, p.91.

⁵⁷ Lyttleton, p.48.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.86.

⁵⁹ *Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F.*, 5 July 1918, p.248.

⁶⁰ Chesser, p.154.

⁶¹ *Auckland Star*, 15 July 1919, p.6; *Ashburton Guardian*, 11 August 1919, p.7; *Grey River Argus*, 24 February 1920, p.5; *N.Z. Truth*, 22 March 1928, p.4.

⁶² Pat Hanna's Diggers Programme, 1929, Theatre - Pat Hanna's Diggers, New Zealand Ephemera, George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries (GGSC).

⁶³ Downes, p.58; Theatre - J C Williamson 1942-1943, Freida Dickens Programme Collection, GGSC; Theatre - J C Williamson 1945, Freida Dickens Programme Collection, GGSC.



Figure 4.1: Stan Lawson with fellow New Zealand Pierrots performer Frank Perkins. The inscription reads "Yours to a top "C", Frank'. D570 E8, Auckland War Memorial Museum (AWMM).

Their finely built physiques and delicate voices may have made Lawson and Nelson especially well suited to playing the role of the 'girl', but they were not the only ones within their concert party to perform in women's clothing. The soldier concert parties of the First World War may have popularized a more glamorous model of female impersonation, but older traditions of drag performance endured. In his role as 'Titania the Fairy Queen', the Kiwis' musical director Dave Kenny evoked an entirely different

vision of femininity. With his bulky frame in a short muslin dress and a long golden wig, Kenny's performance drew upon the older tradition of the comic dame.⁶⁴ The audience were always aware that they were watching a man perform in a female role; the humour came from the juxtaposition of a burly man in women's clothing.

As McKinlay recalled, the Kiwis encouraged all their performers to 'drag up' for certain routines, with almost the entire company dressed in drag for some scenes in the pantomime *Achi Baba and the More or Less Forty Thieves*.⁶⁵ This fluidity, with a number of entertainers performing in women's clothing with different effects, is in marked contrast with the Kiwi Concert Party of the Second World War in which only the recognized female impersonators would perform as women. Although the WWII Kiwis did not draw on the comic dame tradition, the female impersonators' routines were far from uniform. During the Kiwis' 1943 tour of New Zealand, Pricor performed as Primrose, 'The Simple Village Maid', as well as the love interest, Katherine de Vaucelles, in excerpts from *The Vagabond King*. Fellow female impersonator Phil Jay's star turn was as Olga Pulovsky, 'The Beautiful Spy', while together the two took to the stage as the 'Can Can Girls from the Folies Bergeres'.⁶⁶ Their performances were praised in reviews; Christchurch's *Press* reporting that as they 'sang and danced and simpered and giggled ... the audience rocked with mirth'.⁶⁷

After the war the Kiwis' female impersonators continued to play prominent roles within the concert party's revues.⁶⁸ When the Kiwis performed the programme *Alamein* to Wellington audiences in 1950, Wally Pricor appeared again as Katherine de Vaucelles, as well as the school headmistress in a short sketch titled 'Speech Night as St.

⁶⁴ Downes, p.53.

⁶⁵ McKinlay, p.86.

⁶⁶ *Revue No. 8 Programme*, fMS Papers- 4032-08, Terry Vaughan Photos and Press Cuttings – Album I, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), Wellington.

⁶⁷ *Press* (Christchurch), 28 September 1943, p.2.

⁶⁸ During the war the Kiwis performed with two female impersonators. Initially the roles were held by Wally Pricor and Phil Jay, with Bill Baine replacing Jay after the 1943 furlough. When Pricor returned to New Zealand in early 1945 he was replaced with Tom Martin and later Ralph Dyer, who had performed with the Pacific Kiwis. When the Kiwis were established as a commercial revue the number of female impersonators was increased to three with Pricor, Baine and John Hunter, who was not involved in the Entertainment Unit, embarking on the initial tour of Australia. Jay was brought back into the troupe after Baine left to test himself in England, while Jay's later poor health saw Dyer join. Later in the Kiwis' career, Hunter and Dyer also left for England and Baine rejoined on his return. Therefore, in the end Pricor, Baine, Hunter, Jay and Dyer all spent a significant amount of time with the troupe. The last female impersonator to join the Kiwis was Bruce Miller who joined in 1952 for a number of Australian shows. Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go*, pp.9, 57, 72, 75, 97; *Mercury* (Hobart), 12 December 1952, p.10.

Chad's'. John Hunter, meanwhile, performed a scene from the Noël Coward play *Private Lives*, playing the roles of both Elyot and Amanda.⁶⁹ Unlike Julian Eltinge's vaudeville routines earlier in the century, the Kiwis' female impersonators regularly appeared as objects of desire within romantic plots. Producer Terry Vaughan repeatedly claimed that the company made an effort to keep the shows clean and that only one or two 'blue jokes' were included in each performance.⁷⁰ Yet frequently this 'blue' material appears to have been reserved for the drag routines, a decision that surely tested the Kiwis' respectable image. In one sketch from *Alamein* Ralph Dyer appeared as Fifi La Baba, a French woman auditioning for a role in a film. In the sketch the producer made a sexual advance on Fifi, stating:

Producer: 'I'm not the kind of guy that takes you out to dinner, then to a show, then plies you with liquor and takes you up to my flat afterwards. Let's cut out the dinner and go straight up to the flat. Incidentally, how many boyfriends have you?'

Fifi La Baba: 'Boyfriends? Oh about 18'

Producer: '18! All told?'

La Baba: 'No monsieur. One kept his mouth shut.'⁷¹

This exchange not only gives an indication of what would have been considered 'blue material', but also demonstrates a willingness to employ the female impersonators as figures of not only romantic, but also erotic desire. Furthermore, in the enigmatic punch line, 'One kept his mouth shut', it is unclear what exactly was 'told'. Was it that she had other boyfriends or that Fifi La Baba, like Ralph Dyer, was really a man? Or something else all together? The routine played with this uncertainty, reflecting the sense of unease and intrigue surrounding both the desire for a sexually confident woman and a cross-dressing man. Due to the fast paced nature of the revue, however, audiences were not encouraged to dwell on these kinds of uncertainties.

⁶⁹ U Series: Kiwi Concert Party Production, P1-40, DAT 165, Radio New Zealand National Sound Archive (RNZNSA), Christchurch.

⁷⁰ Spectrum 422/423: 'Sing As We Go', CDR815, RNZSA.

⁷¹ D Series: Kiwi Concert Party, excerpts from *Alamein*, DCDR40A, RNZSA.

In a recording of *Alamein* the laughter and applause that the 'Fifa La Baba' sketch received suggests it was one of the revue's more popular segments. However, this popularity was not reflected in the critics' reviews. Critics appear to have been at ease evaluating their appreciation of Wally Pricitor's fine voice and John Hunter's graceful dancing, but they were less comfortable describing the appeal of routines such as the Fifa La Baba sketch, or the 'Can Can Girls of Folies Bergeres'. Even the *Dominion's* tame description of Ralph Dyer's performance as Olga Pulovsky 'The Beautiful Spy' as 'strutting and coquetting with delicious abandon' was in stark contrast to the majority of reviews that would simply praise their professionalism or skill as performers.⁷²

The Kiwi Concert Party's official line was that the female impersonators were 'virtually press-ganged into the unit and female roles' and that they were undergoing an unpleasant task out of necessity.⁷³ This rhetoric was also employed for the First World War concert parties, but it became much more overt during the Second World War.⁷⁴ Reviewers stressed the professionalism of the performers, depicting the drag roles as a necessity within the all-male context of the soldier concert party. Chris Brickell, however, suggested this rhetoric 'bore little relation to reality' and that '[m]ost of the impersonators, like their Australian, Canadian, British and American counterparts, relished the opportunity to do drag and be applauded for it'.⁷⁵ Brickell cited international literature that claimed many of the female impersonators performed in drag before the war, drawing in particular on Garry Wotherspoon's assertion that some of the female impersonators with the Australian military had previously been active in Sydney and Melbourne drag scenes.⁷⁶ At the same time, however, Terry Vaughan's claim that Phil Jay stated he had always hated performing in drag should not simply be discounted.⁷⁷ While the 'reality' of the performers' attitudes to drag may be more uncertain than the concert party promoters suggested, claims that they had to be persuaded 'almost at bayonet-point' demonstrates the extent to which some viewers sought reassurance that female impersonators were playing a necessary role and felt

⁷² *Dominion* (Wellington), 10 October 1950, p.8.

⁷³ Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go*, p.8.

⁷⁴ A 1928 profile on Stan Lawson claimed he had to be 'inveigled ... into taking the necessary soubrette parts', *N.Z. Truth*, 22 March 1928, p.4.

⁷⁵ Brickell, *Mates & Lovers*, pp.183-84.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.406, n.510.

⁷⁷ Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go*, p.136.

some discomfort in the thought that the 'femmes' may have enjoyed performing in drag.⁷⁸

The Kiwis' female impersonators were not only presented as reluctant to perform as women; their performances were portrayed as the work of dedicated professionals. As Brickell claimed, the general public saw each female impersonator as 'a highly effective performer, [who] excelled at "doing his job"' and therefore 'epitomised conventional masculine expectations'.⁷⁹ Tony Rex stressed that Pricor had to endure all the same hardships as the other performers despite being the star of the wartime troupe. Rex marvelled at Pricor's excellent performances in below freezing temperatures, sand and hailstorms 'dressed in some flimsy cotton frock or "Can-Can" costume'.⁸⁰ In their tours following the war the emphasis on the professionalism of the female impersonators continued, their star billing presented as a reflection of their dedication. On their 1950 New Zealand tour the *Press* claimed Wally Pricor, John Hunter and Ralph Dyer were 'probably the hardest-worked members of the cast', their impressive performances reflecting the seriousness and professionalism with which they undertook their roles.⁸¹

As well as asserting that female impersonators were reluctant professionals, promoters and the performers themselves went to great lengths to assert their masculinity offstage. Vaughan claimed that after the shows it was 'off with the makeup and into the battledress'.⁸² Likewise, a programme for the Kiwis' show *Alamein* drew upon the public fascination with the female impersonators' dressing room and presented the room as the site of the 'transformation scene', in which 'Wally Pricor, Bill Bain and John Hunter transform themselves from ordinary men into the attractive creatures they appear on stage'.⁸³ This rhetoric of transformation reassured readers that their feminine performances onstage did not taint their masculinity offstage. In an interview with John Hunter the interviewer remarked on Hunter's 'masculine outlook' right up until the moment before he went onstage, while his demand for an especially

⁷⁸ *Sunday Herald* (Sydney), 23 January 1949, p.13.

⁷⁹ Brickell, *Mates & Lovers*, p.189.

⁸⁰ Rex, pp.2, 46.

⁸¹ *Press*, 4 December 1950, p.3.

⁸² *N.Z. Listener*, 4 November 1978, p.20.

⁸³ *Alamein* programme, 1946, Terry Vaughan Photos and Press Cuttings, fMS Papers 4032 10, ATL.

smooth shave made him an ironic promotional figure for Club Razor Blades.⁸⁴ Mary Millins, wife of company performer Glen Millins and the troupe's 'wardrobe mistress', highlighted the 'femmes' enduring masculine behaviour in the moments before stepping onto the stage. She claimed that even when dressing '[t]hey will not put a dress on over their heads as a woman does, but insist on stepping into it just as a man does into his trousers'.⁸⁵ Onstage the female impersonators may have 'defied detection', but it was made clear that offstage these were 'real men'.⁸⁶



Figure 4.2: Club Razor Blades advertisement featuring John Hunter. Nola Miller Papers relating to John Hunter and The Kiwis Revue Company, 77-244-6/16, Alexander Turnbull Librar, Wellington (ATL).

⁸⁴ Nola Miller, Papers relating to John Hunter and The Kiwis Revue Company.

⁸⁵ Undated and unattributed clipping, Ralph Dyer, fl 1947–1991, Clippings on the Kiwi Concert Party, MS-Papers-5582, ATL.

⁸⁶ *Evening Post* (Wellington), 7 September 1950, p.10.

The female impersonators' rhetoric of 'transformation' not only reaffirmed their masculine offstage image, but presented their onstage performance as a convincing portrayal of femininity. In an interview Dyer explained: '[w]e try to make our deception complete by appearing natural and not stressing our roles'.⁸⁷ While it was considered acceptable during the First World War to have performers such as Dave Kenny perform a caricature of femininity, the WWII Kiwis were applauded for playing their role 'straight'.⁸⁸ Vaughan stressed that the Kiwis' female impersonators presented a tasteful portrayal of femininity and repeatedly claimed they 'unconsciously revived' the Shakespearean tradition of men playing women's roles.⁸⁹ This approach was commended in reviews with one profile praising the Kiwis for refraining from 'any silly burlesque nonsense of flapping bosoms and beefy legs'.⁹⁰ As the Kiwis developed as a commercial revue company they no longer had to improvise with costumes made out of khaki or whatever was at hand, as they had during the war. Mary Millins sought to make outfits that 'could be worn just as well by women in the street or at a ball', while Ralph Dyer, who had an impressive pedigree in costume design, sought to present an elegant, refined vision of femininity (see figure 4.3).⁹¹

Crucially the female impersonators' transformations maintained the boundary between masculinity and femininity, ensuring it was always clear what gender was being performed. Tony Rex and John Reed both recounted stories in which soldiers, though curiously never New Zealand soldiers, were regularly deceived by Wally Pricor's performance and were shocked when he removed his wig at the end of his act.⁹² However, although these incidents illustrate the female impersonators' ability to deceive their audience, it reasserts the point that entertainers like Pricor performed as a woman, rather than a man dressed as a woman. That the female impersonators could perform a convincing portrayal of femininity was seen as a sign of their great skill and masculine professionalism, while their refusal to blur the boundaries between masculinity and femininity ensured that, among conservative viewers, they were not considered a 'travesty' that could disrupt the gender binary. Rather than blurring the

⁸⁷ Undated and unattributed clipping, Ralph Dyer, fl 1947–1991, Clippings on the Kiwi Concert Party.

⁸⁸ *Sunday Herald*, 10 April 1949, p.9.

⁸⁹ Rex, p.98; Terry Vaughan, Interviewed by John Rohde, LC-1324, ATL; Rex, pp.98–99; Terry Vaughan, 'A Pedalpoint: The Kiwi Concert Party in North Africa', *Music in New Zealand*, 11, 1990, p.35.

⁹⁰ *Sunday Herald*, 1 April 1949, p.9.

⁹¹ Undated and unattributed clipping, Ralph Dyer, fl 1947–1991, Clippings on the Kiwi Concert Party.

⁹² Rex, p.46; Reed, p.58.

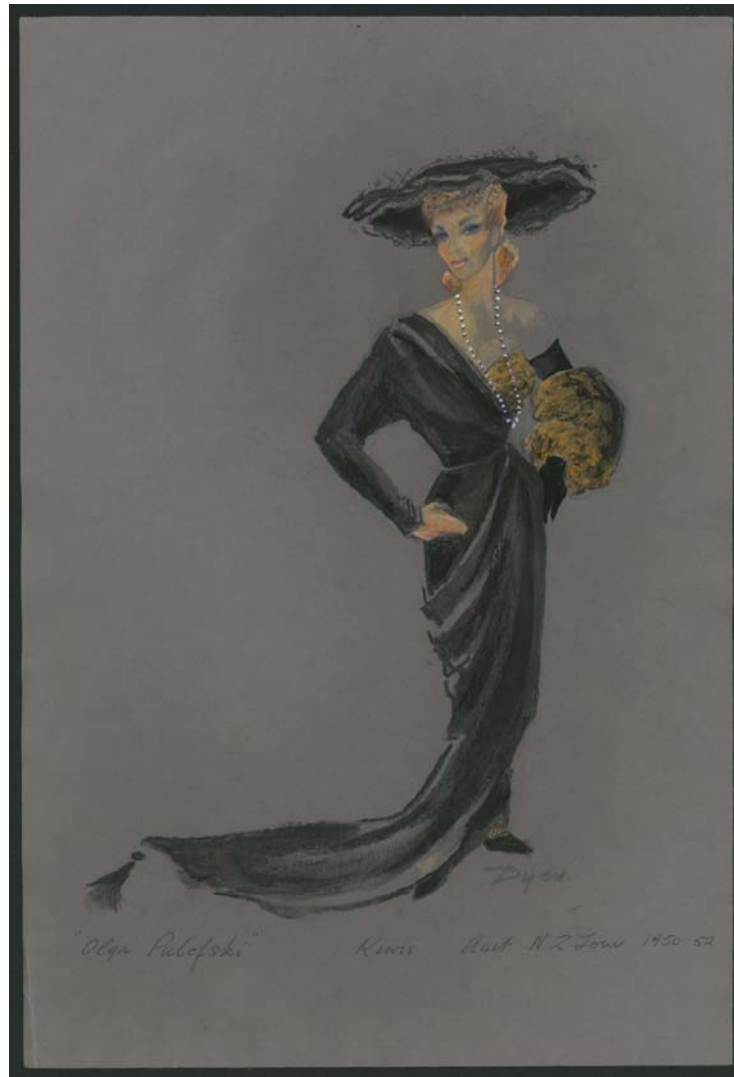


Figure 4.3: Ralph Dyer's costume design for the role of Olga Pulovsky, PD255(1), AWMM

boundary between masculinity and femininity, their complete transformation ensured this distinction could be maintained. In doing so concert party performers resisted being identified as what Marjorie Garber has called a third 'mode of articulation' that could disrupt the cultural construction of gender difference.⁹³ Instead they conformed to what Garber has identified as the tendency 'to erase the third term, to appropriate the cross-dresser "as" one of the two sexes'.⁹⁴

Although the critical consensus was that the Kiwis' female impersonators were respectable rather than scandalous, not all critics agreed. When the Kiwis began their two year residency in Melbourne the *Bulletin* claimed that 'if a woman appeared in the

⁹³ Garber, p.13.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.10.

street with hands and legs like the Kiwi “women” she would be regarded as a monstrosity and attract the attention of the sleepiest policeman’.⁹⁵ This review highlighted the long standing paradox that the Kiwis’ female impersonators could be praised for performances onstage, but on the street cross-dressing could bring persecution. It was this kind of link that Terry Vaughan attempted to avoid with his enigmatic claim that the female impersonators performed as ‘feminine rather than effeminate’, something he believed to be ‘a fine but important distinction’.⁹⁶ A number of other reviews followed Vaughan’s lead. They reassured readers that, while they may have been put off female impersonation in some recent performances — although papers were reticent in revealing what exactly may have deterred audiences — the Kiwis’ ‘femmes’ were talented, professional entertainers.⁹⁷

As the Kiwis became more popular the *Bulletin* recognized what had become the normative reading of their performances and later claimed that although the paper had ‘no great affection for *ersatz* females’, it was ‘forced to unqualified admiration of the impersonations of John Hunter, Wally Pricor and Phil Jay’.⁹⁸ Later the praise became even clearer when the paper stated that ‘[f]emale impersonators John Hunter, Wally Pricor and Ralph Dyer are so amazingly clever that they completely break down any prejudices one may have against that particular line of entertainment’.⁹⁹ The *Bulletin*’s initial reaction to the Kiwis’ female impersonators and their change in opinion shows how tentative any drag routine’s claim to respectability could be. The distinction that Ullman drew between the ‘male defectives’ who ‘decked themselves in the frock and frills of womankind’, and the ‘brawny, intensely masculine’ female impersonators, was not always clear to audiences.¹⁰⁰ Crucially any claim to respectability appears to have been based as much on critical consensus as on the routines themselves.

* * *

With a deficit of ‘real’ women, female impersonators were considered a necessary feature of any WWI concert party. When soldier concert parties were revived for the

⁹⁵ *Bulletin* (Sydney), 1 January 1947, p.24.

⁹⁶ Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go*, p.9.

⁹⁷ *Argus*, 23 December 1946, p.4; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 February 1949, p.5.

⁹⁸ *Bulletin*, 9 February 1949, p.26.

⁹⁹ *Bulletin*, 20 July 1949, p.24.

¹⁰⁰ Ullman, p.590.

Second World War New Zealand women were again excluded, despite their greater involvement in the armed forces. The exclusion of women from the Kiwi Concert Party was justified through the concert party's status as a combatant unit that was under military discipline and ready to go into battle if necessary.¹⁰¹ In this sense the use of female impersonators reflected the gendering of military service and after the war was asserted to highlight the masculine nature of the concert party. Vaughan clearly expressed this sentiment when he claimed, '[r]eal girls could hardly have coped with life in a military unit in the desert, surrounded by grim digs, despite what the "Women's Libbers" may say!'¹⁰² A profile in Sydney's *Sunday Herald* agreed, presenting the Kiwis' use of female impersonators as a solution to a crisis, namely that '[g]irls could not go where the Kiwis were going, but just as surely there could be no successful show for an Army audience without girls'.¹⁰³

Although the Kiwis' commitment to performing as close as possible to the front line put them under considerable danger, concert parties did present an alternative for those who sought to avoid direct combat.¹⁰⁴ Reflecting on the brief involvement of Maurice Clare, who had been deputy leader of the London Philharmonic Orchestra before the war, Vaughan stated: 'it was an escape, I knew'.¹⁰⁵ This perception that concert parties provided an escape has been reworked by Allan Bérubé to argue that concert parties provided a 'gay refuge' for American soldiers during the Second World War.¹⁰⁶ Bérubé focused on the female impersonators in particular and argued that concert parties provided a space for queer expression in an environment protected from criticism and contempt. This portrayal of concert parties and their female impersonators fits with Brickell's assertion that the concert party enabled performers to 'express their queer sensibility in a context that protected them from adverse comment'.¹⁰⁷

Elsewhere in his text Brickell drew upon photographs and diaries to effectively argue that during the First World War intimacy between soldiers was more widespread

¹⁰¹ Downes, p.77.

¹⁰² Rex, p.98.

¹⁰³ *Sunday Herald*, 10 April 1949, p.9.

¹⁰⁴ *Otago Daily Times*, 7 October 1943, p.6.

¹⁰⁵ Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go*, p.47.

¹⁰⁶ Bérubé, p.82.

¹⁰⁷ Brickell, *Mates & Lovers*, p.192.

than many historians have suggested.¹⁰⁸ Writing on the Second World War Brickell highlighted the diversity of attitudes towards homoeroticism. He claimed that some believed that same-sex desire could not be expressed in such a disciplined setting, others found that intimate relationships were possible providing they remained platonic, while others still found there were opportunities for romantic relationships so long as those involved kept their activities below the radar.¹⁰⁹ As well as revealing commonly overlooked activity around same-sex desire, Brickell's work demonstrates the shortcomings of any attempt to identify a universal soldier experience. Each individual's unit, the interpersonal relationships they forged during service, and the expectations they brought with them to the war influenced how they experienced or interpreted the erotic potential of military service.

Brickell's work suggests that while military discipline and regulation ensured same-sex desire in the New Zealand military was kept discrete during the Second World War, individual responses to this desire between soldiers was varied and nuanced. In a similar vein, Paul Jackson argued that although those who engaged in same-sex relationships within the Canadian army during the Second World War were vulnerable to persecution at an institutional level, there was a greater acceptance of homoerotic desire between soldiers and commanding officers.¹¹⁰ Jackson claimed that competent soldiers were rarely brought before the medical boards and most commanding officers did not believe they were disruptive to unit cohesion.¹¹¹ Jackson drew on the claim of a member of the Canadian World War II concert party the 'Tin Hats' that their group was considerably less homophobic than other units and suggested that concert parties could be one of the 'friendlier environments' where discrete displays of homoeroticism were accepted.¹¹²

The female impersonators' roles may have provided a space for queer expression, but that does not preclude the possibility that gay performers would have been victims of homophobia. As Bérubé has demonstrated, gay concert party members, and female impersonators in particular, may have found an expressive outlet, but there

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.90.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.179.

¹¹⁰ Paul Jackson, *One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military During World War II*, Montréal, 2004 p.265.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p.267.

¹¹² Quoted in *ibid.*, p.258.

was still the potential for censure if they were publically identified as gay.¹¹³ Furthermore, not all performers would necessarily have shared Bernard Freyberg's sentiment that performers such as Wally Pricor were 'worth a company of infantrymen'.¹¹⁴ As the newspaper article that opened this chapter suggested, although the female impersonators were seen to be of central importance for the Kiwis, they were differentiated from the other performers in subtle ways. Herbert Ross, who saw the Kiwis during the Second World War, claimed that the female impersonators' performances were praised, yet they generally kept themselves separate from the rest of the performers and did not mix well with other soldiers.¹¹⁵ George Pomeroy, who performed with Australian concert parties during the Second World War, also illustrates this trend. When Pomeroy was asked about the dynamics within the groups he responded '[w]e had a couple of female impersonators and they used to get a little bit fractious at times, you know, they'd get a bit uptight about things. If their wardrobe was getting a bit wet and damp and various things would happen to their gear and that'.¹¹⁶ This claim appeared alongside Pomeroy's repeated assertion that the female impersonators were just ordinary troupe members and had to face the same hardships that other performers endured.¹¹⁷ Paradoxically, Pomeroy's repeated assertion that the female impersonators were just 'one of the boys' only served to highlight the sense that they were frequently judged to be different from the other performers.

Within the New Zealand concert parties many performers chose to keep their erotic lives private. All performers adopted a 'straight' persona in public, although some, such as Theo Trezise from the WWI Kiwis and John Hunter from the Second World War, were prominent within emerging queer scenes.¹¹⁸ Fellow performers took certain measures to help promote an image of the female impersonators as masculine professional performers. When Tony Rex began work on a history of the concert party he claimed in a letter to violinist Cyril Pascoe that he was, in part, motivated by what he saw as an inaccurate portrayal of the Kiwi Concert Party in a recent television special.

¹¹³ Bérubé, p.87.

¹¹⁴ Rex, p.4.

¹¹⁵ Herbert Cecil Lionel Ross, Interviewed by Brent Coutts, Thursday 8 December 2011. Brent Coutts personal collection. I am grateful to Brent for granting me access to this interview.

¹¹⁶ George Pomeroy interview, transcript of oral history recording, S00595, p.17, Australian War Memorial Archive (AWMA).

¹¹⁷ George Pomeroy interview, pp.6, 8.

¹¹⁸ Brickell, *Mates & Lovers*, pp.106, 182.

Rex claimed he hoped to 'set things right with the public to offset the hopeless portrayal of our show, particularly the "femmes" by the N.Z. Television people'.¹¹⁹ Rex's letter also mentioned John Hunter specifically, claiming he believed 'a lot of the kudos we still wallow in is very much due to his tremendous talent in the post-war years'.¹²⁰ The Kiwis' collective effort to ward off suggestions of effeminacy and homosexuality can be seen as a desire to protect their co-performers, and the revue, from adverse criticism. There could, however, have been additional consequences of any unwanted accusations. If the female impersonators were identified as gay, what would have been made of those, like Rex, who frequently performed alongside them as their lovers and admirers in romantic duets and sketches?



**Figure 4.4: Tony Rex and Wally Prictor perform a duet at the Maadi Camp. World War 1939-1945
official negatives: DA Series, 1941, DA-01442, ATL.**

¹¹⁹ Rex, n.p.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*



Although the female impersonators were included in World War I concert parties to provide a necessary 'feminine element', the performances also provided a suitable context in which audiences could openly view and evaluate their fellow soldiers' bodies. Paul Fussell has considered the open admiration of the bodies of young men in the war poetry of the First World War, something he claimed was absent in the poetry of the Second World War. Analysing what he called the 'homoerotic motif in Great War writing', Fussell emphasized the significance of the aesthetic movement in encouraging 'the rediscovery of the erotic attractiveness of young men' and providing the rhetoric with which to describe men's bodies.¹²¹ Just as the venerability of naked flesh provided a reference with which to dwell on soldiers' nudity in the ever popular bathing scenes, concert parties provided a context within which soldiers could observe and comment on male bodies. George Lyttleton's descriptions of Stuart Nelson's figure and his comparison of the 'beauty' of Nelson and Stan Lawson illustrates the ways in which drag performances enabled and encouraged viewers to evaluate and admire aspects of their fellow soldiers' bodies. This could be a simple aesthetic judgement, but it also operated as a cathartic ritual that ensured homoerotic desire was directed into appropriate channels.

David Boxwell interpreted the concert parties' drag performances during the First World War as a solution to a crisis in male sociability, caused by the tensions between homoerotic desire and enforced heterosexuality within a homosocial military environment.¹²² Employing Victor Turner's notion of social drama, where social drama consists of breach, recognition, redress and resolution, Boxwell argued that on the concert party stage the viewer was able to confront, comprehend and respond to this crisis. The construction of a 'woman' may have maintained heteronormative romance, but this was obviously disrupted by the audience's awareness that both performers were men. Through connotation, Boxwell argued, significations of homoeroticism could be expressed and/or received by the audience within a 'dominant, militarist, and heterosexist culture that forbids any open display of male-male erotic desire'.¹²³ Boxwell's interpretation of the concert parties highlights the 'rich connotative

¹²¹ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, pp.280-81.

¹²² Boxwell, p.3.

¹²³ *ibid.*, p.10.

possibilities of drag' that enabled audiences to decode what was performed onstage according to what Marjorie Garber has called the 'erotics of interpretation'.¹²⁴

Boxwell's work may have effectively challenged attempts to see the female impersonators solely as 'surrogate women', but the term 'surrogate women' still reflects the rhetoric used by those who viewed the performances and is, therefore, valuable for developing an understanding of a common kind of audience response. Through the adoption of feminine clothing and mannerisms sections of the audience saw the female impersonators as effectively becoming women. This suggests an understanding of femininity as something that could be learnt and performed, rather than being a fixed biological determinant. The enigmatic suggestion by one audience member of a British concert party that '[i]t all seems to show that English beauty is essentially masculine' suggests, at the very least, non-binary thinking about masculinity and femininity.¹²⁵ Whatever their intention, the routines implicitly foregrounded the performative nature of femininity, if not the whole gender order.

Sharon Ullman identified a similar sentiment in her examination of American drag shows, citing one critic who claimed that, '[j]ust as a white man makes the best stage Negro, so a man gives a more photographic interpretation of femininity than the average woman is able to give'.¹²⁶ The comparison with blackface minstrel shows is especially evocative since it illustrates the power relationships that structured the performances. In both minstrel shows and drag performances those being impersonated were denied control of their own cultural representation.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the blackface routines of nineteenth century American minstrel shows were frequently performed alongside female impersonators. In the late nineteenth century the women's rights movement was frequently parodied as attempts to challenge women's traditional subservient role was ridiculed. As Robert C. Toll has argued: '[w]omen, like Negroes, provided one of the few stable "inferiors" that assured white men of their status. Since women's rights seemed to be challenging that, minstrels

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p.13.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Fuller, p.106.

¹²⁶ Ullman, p.578.

¹²⁷ Eric Lott, 'Blackface and Blackness: The Minstrel Show in American Culture', in Annemarie Bean, James Vernon Hatch and Brooks McNamara, eds, *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, Hanover, 1996, p.6.

lashed out against the movement almost as strongly as they attacked Negroes who threatened white male superiority'.¹²⁸

By the outbreak of the Second World War the discursive links between cross-dressing and homoeroticism had strengthened in the public imagination as homoerotic subcultures gradually received greater media attention.¹²⁹ As discussed previously, in this period the justifications for the female impersonators' performances became more pronounced and certain measures were taken to ensure the performances were seen to be in good taste. However, whether intended by the performers or not, the connotative nature of drag performance allowed some, as Brickell has argued, to interpret the shows in their 'queerest sense'.¹³⁰ At times viewers themselves appear to have picked up on and played with this. In the *Tripoli Times* one reviewer stated 'I take off my hat to Terry Vaughan for his orchestrations', before continuing: 'my shirt — that comes off for Wally Prictor the Prima Donna of all impersonators', then 'tak[ing] off what is left of my clothing in praise of beefy singer Tony Rex'. Finally the reviewer stood 'in naked praise of the best show in Africa'.¹³¹ Whatever the author's intention, the figurative striptease within his review evoked a sense of vulnerability and excitement.

The intimate descriptions of the performers' bodies that had been evident during the Great War were replaced during the Second World War with a focus on the female impersonators' skills as performers. A number of viewers commented on a performer's figure, but they were more likely to emphasize his fine voice, graceful movement, or glamorous costume.¹³² However, despite Vaughan's efforts to limit the amount of risqué content, the routines still provided opportunities to admire the bodies of their fellow soldiers. The 'Can Can Girls of Folies Bergeres' was routinely performed throughout the Kiwis' career. Besides the obvious comedy of the routine, it also presented an opportunity to view the bodies of the female impersonators and present them as erotic objects.

¹²⁸ Robert C. Toll, 'Social Commentary in Late-Nineteenth-Century White Minstrelsy', in Annemarie Bean, James Vernon Hatch and Brooks McNamara, eds, *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, Hanover, 1996, p.88.

¹²⁹ Brickell, *Mates & Lovers*, p.211.

¹³⁰ D.A. Miller, 'Anal Rope', in Diana Fuss, ed., *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, New York, 1991, p.15; Brickell, *Mates & Lovers*, p.192.

¹³¹ *Tripoli Times*, 25 February 1943, p.1, Tony Rex, Kiwi Concert Party Papers, Ms-Papers-5735, ATL.

¹³² Spectrum 422/423 – 'Sing As We Go', RSNZSA.



Figure 4.5: Bill Bain and Tom Martin perform as 'Can Can Girls of Folies Bergeres' in Italy. Martin performed with the Kiwis for a brief period after Wally Pricor was graded out of the military.

World War 1939-1945 official negatives - DA Series, DA-05760-F, ATL.

Drag performances did not, however, solely appeal to soldiers' desire for fellow soldiers, sublimated or otherwise. As Ullman's work illustrates, female impersonation provided men with an opportunity to reinforce their authority over representations of femininity in the face of women's more visible engagement in civil activity.¹³³ Even though drag routines reproduced gender through a performative lens, there was a clear

¹³³ Ullman, p.582.

prescriptive element to the performances as the Kiwis' drag routines responded to a desire to view traditional gendered stereotypes. In her examination of New Zealand women's experience of the Second World War, Deborah Montgomerie considered the responses to the increasing number of women working outside the home and their integration into the military. Montgomerie highlighted in particular the tensions surrounding viewing women in military uniform and the fear that the uniform might not only undermine their femininity, but that the women's femininity may devalue the uniform.¹³⁴ Through an analysis of cartoons and advertisements, Montgomerie argued that '[w]omen were simultaneously stereotyped, trivialized and flattered by images that worked to normalize aspects of wartime change by reconciling them with glamour, homemaking and maternity'.¹³⁵ Likewise, through female impersonation men were able to maintain control over representations of femininity, promoting glamour while ridiculing, or ignoring, models of progressive womanhood that threatened to destabilize male dominance.¹³⁶ This reading of the drag routines needs to be considered alongside an awareness of the show's queer moment. Although, as Boxwell argued, their misogynistic potential to reassert normative understandings of sex, gender and sexuality may have qualified their more subversive potential to articulate homoerotic desire, this does not make one aspect any more authentic than another.¹³⁷ Instead they demonstrate the variety of ways the performances could be read. Misogynistic and queer readings complemented one another and viewers could simultaneously laugh at a parody of femininity while admiring the soldiers' bodies.

When the Kiwis returned to New Zealand following the Second World War the female impersonators continued to reproduce traditional models of femininity. As with Julian Eltinge's audiences earlier in the century, promotion of the Kiwis' female impersonators focused on their female audience, for whom they were promoted as style icons.¹³⁸ Although scholars such as Kate Davey have argued that female impersonation, even if it says something about women, is 'primarily about men, addressed to men, and for men', the Kiwis' female fan base is worthy of close analysis.¹³⁹ That said, it is not

¹³⁴ Deborah Montgomerie, 'Reassessing Rosie: World War II, New Zealand Women and the Iconography of Femininity', *Gender and History*, 8, 1, 1996, p.114.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p.127.

¹³⁶ Ullman, p.578.

¹³⁷ Boxwell, p.11.

¹³⁸ Ullman, p.581.

¹³⁹ Davey, p.133.

always clear how seriously audiences took the female impersonators' status as glamorous role models. When the *Sydney Morning Herald* claimed John Hunter was 'the envy of most of the plain girls in last night's audience' it is debatable how earnestly the newspaper intended the remark.¹⁴⁰ At a time when the *N.Z. Truth* reported concern that women were enjoying the 'manly art' of boxing and returned servicewomen were vowing they would never 'return to high heels after the comfort of their service shoes', the female impersonators presented an absurd, rather than reassuring, portrayal of traditional glamour.¹⁴¹ Their emphasis on nostalgic visions of glamour reflected what performers understood a woman to be. It would have been open to interpretation, however, whether women in the audience saw them as an embodiment of a feminine ideal to which they should aspire, or a parody of beauty culture.

Throughout the Kiwis' civilian tours the female impersonators remained central figures within the party, fulfilling the audiences' desire to see the kind of performances that were staged during the war. Cross-dressing had long been associated with deviant sexual behaviour in the public imagination and newspapers such as the *N.Z. Truth* regularly scandalized readers with tales of gender deception. In December 1946 the *N.Z. Truth* reported on a 'grotesque secret' that had been kept for 41 years, when it was discovered that 'Mrs. Kate Orton, wife of 62-year-old Robert Woolgar Orton ... was none other than a fully-developed male'.¹⁴² Robert Orton claimed that until they married 'he was ignorant of the fact that she was not a woman', however, 'in the end I decided to see it through'. The *N.Z. Truth* did their own research to reveal that "'Kate's" real name was Kei Rewiri Paraoana'.¹⁴³ In a similar vein Annie Payne married a woman and lived as a man until she was she moved to an 'old man's home' and her 'sex was discovered when she was taken to the bath'.¹⁴⁴ In these stories, and others like them, the paper's central concern was that in such situations the public could be 'deceived' as to one's 'true' sex. From the German woman who impersonated a US Army agent, to the marriage of two Auckland women who passed as 'husband and wife' until the elder woman was called up for military service, these cases reflected not simply a concern that the wider public

¹⁴⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 February 1949, p.5.

¹⁴¹ *N.Z. Truth*, 24 April 1946, p.24; 13 March 1946, p.25; 1 March 1950, p.27.

¹⁴² *N.Z. Truth*, 4 December 1946, p.1.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Evening Post*, 15 May 1939, p.13.

could be misled as to a person's 'true' gender, but a fascination with the prospect that gender was malleable and open to rearticulation.¹⁴⁵

Individuals such as Kate Orton/Kei Rewiri Paraonan and Annie Payne were able to perform their gender as they chose and up until the exceptional circumstances of their 'discovery' did not arouse suspicion among the public. All these stories were structured around a rhetoric of discovery whereby order had been restored once each individual's 'true' gender had been revealed. The Kiwis' drag performances were at once tied to these stories and distinguished from them. Their gender 'deception' happened within the carnivalesque context of the concert party. The expectation was that offstage these men lived 'ordinary' lives. The ritual 'de-wigging' at the close of each routine performed a similar task to the newspaper articles' 'reveal', reassuring audiences that order had been restored and that the individuals involved would no longer traverse the boundaries of their chromosomal sex. However, while the Kiwis' distinguished themselves from the *N.Z. Truth's* 'shocking' exposés, these stories provided the cultural backdrop that fuelled the fascination with the Kiwis' female impersonators.

Although most newspapers sought to reassure readers that the Kiwis' drag performances were not a 'travesty', this did not prevent others from speculating and making their own assumptions about the performers' sexual practices and preferences. As the wedding story that began this chapter illustrated, readers of the *Argus* were not expected to be surprised that the female impersonators were not married. Elsewhere the *Argus* had singled the female impersonators out for praise, but drag's cultural association with homoeroticism led audiences to speculate on their connotative nature.¹⁴⁶ Terry Vaughan recounted an experience at a party after a show where a woman, referring to the female impersonators, asked 'are they ... you know ... are they — well, you know what I mean!' Vaughan responded by pointing towards Ralph Dyer and suggesting she ask him herself: 'I notice he's talking to your husband. Better hurry'.¹⁴⁷ Anecdotes such as this suggest there were audience members who would have detected a 'queer sensibility' in the Kiwis' drag performances, but without it necessarily provoking a feeling of mutual queer recognition. The *Argus's* promotion of

¹⁴⁵ *N.Z. Truth*, 23 December 1946, p.1; 29 August 1945, p.11; 28 November 1945, p.15.

¹⁴⁶ *Argus*, 23 December 1946, p.4; 12 January 1948, p.5; 20 October 1952, p.2.

¹⁴⁷ Vaughan, *Whistle as You Go*, p.98.

the Kiwis, which depicted them as respectable entertainers as they aligned the show's star performers with illicit sexuality, demonstrates the ambivalent and nuanced attitudes towards the emerging queer subculture.

An article on John Hunter began by reassuring readers that to Hunter's 'complete relief' all his fan mail came from women. Within the article the possibility of men being attracted to the female impersonators was discretely acknowledged, then obscured. The article mentioned those in the audience who let out 'low wolf-whistles when Hunter, in high heels, a clinging frock and a bustline right out of Hollywood moves silkily on to the stage', but then claimed those who responded this way did not know the background of the Kiwis and 'refuse to believe he is any other than a young woman'.¹⁴⁸ Hunter's personal favourites from his repertoire were his scenes from the Noël Coward plays *Private Lives* and *Bittersweet*, in which he performed both the male and female parts.¹⁴⁹ Hunter's Coward performances are likely to have struck a chord with those in the audience who were part of what Alan Sinfield referred to as the 'knowing subculture of privileged insiders' who detected the homoerotic subtext of Coward's work.¹⁵⁰ However, although Hunter's performance of both the *Private Lives* leads, Amanda and Elyot, may have pre-empted Coward's claim that he saw the two characters as a single part rather than two separate identities, something Penny Farfan argued disrupts conventional gender norms, critics saw it as a sign of his professional skill that audiences could always distinguish between the two characters.¹⁵¹ Sydney's *Daily Mirror* praised Hunter's acting skill as he 'turns his head to play both roles', while the *Sydney Morning Herald* remarked on his ability to imitate both Coward and Gertrude Lawrence, rather than collapse the boundaries between the two.¹⁵² These concurrent readings of Hunter's performance, one that detected a queer subtext and another that focused on his skill as a performer, were not, of course, mutually exclusive, but instead demonstrate the ways in which the drag performers could simultaneously subvert and uphold the gender order.

¹⁴⁸ *People*, 29 August 1951, n.p., Nola Miller, Papers relating to John Hunter and The Kiwis Revue Company.

¹⁴⁹ *Sunday Herald*, 4 May 1952, p.12.

¹⁵⁰ Alan Sinfield, 'Private Lives/Public Theatre: Noel Coward and the Politics of Homosexual Representation', *Representations*, 36, 1991, p.53.

¹⁵¹ Penny Farfan, 'Noel Coward and Sexual Modernism: Private Lives as Queer Comedy', *Modern Drama*, 48, 4, 2005, p.681.

¹⁵² *Daily Mirror*, 2 February 1949, n.p., fMS Papers 4032 10 Terry Vaughan Photos and Press Cuttings, ATL; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 February 1949, p.5.



On the soldier concert party stage, drag was used to enable the portrayal of romance within a homosocial environment and, therefore, maintain the heteronormative relationship between gender and desire. The 'transformation' that the WWII Kiwis' female impersonators undertook may have revealed the performative nature of femininity, but reports suggest audiences were not necessarily disturbed by this, providing the performers upheld a recognisable model of ideal femininity. There was no ambiguity as to what gender they were performing and, therefore, no threat of a third 'mode of articulation' that could prompt viewers to question the cultural construction of the gender binary.¹⁵³ Moreover, even as audiences praised performers for their convincing portrayal of femininity, there was never any doubt that it was not an authentic presentation of their 'natural' gender, and therefore, viewers were not necessarily provoked to question their own ontology of gender.¹⁵⁴ Finally, the drag routines were promoted as a temporary transformation, separate from the suitably masculine lives the female impersonators were presented as living offstage.¹⁵⁵ By presenting this gender transformation as a spectacle for the duration of the performance only, the Kiwis' drag routines were separated from the mundane everyday behaviour through which gender was ordinarily reproduced. The female impersonators drew on public intrigue with the ways in which gender boundaries could be traversed, but by upholding accepted gender categories and the behaviour associated with those categories they ensured their routines remained legible within a framework of heteronormativity and did not provoke viewers to rethink their own gendered identity. In this way they were able to, paradoxically, simultaneously undermine and reassert the gender binary.

Whereas during the First World War most performers were happy to put on women's clothing when needed, during the Second World War the greater measures that were taken to ensure a proper and respectable performance meant that only certain members were able, and willing, to properly perform the role. Furthermore, whereas those who praised the ability of Stuart Nelson and Stan Lawson saw their skill in performing women's roles as naturally endowed upon them, the female

¹⁵³ Garber, pp.10–13.

¹⁵⁴ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, Boca Raton, 2004, p.214.

¹⁵⁵ *Sunday Herald*, 4 May 1952, p.12.

impersonators of the Second World War were promoted as hard working professionals and their ability to 'suspend belief' was seen as a reflection of their ability as performers. During the First World War female impersonation on the theatrical stage was still a common occurrence and, particularly in the context of an all-male concert party, hardly considered worthy of alarm. However, while those who dressed in drag outside of the theatre had been liable to persecution for some time, by the end of World War II as instances of cross-dressing attracted greater media attention, the reputation of those who performed in drag onstage increasingly came under threat. As those who cross-dressed in their private lives provoked a greater sense of public alarm, the Kiwis' performers tried to distance themselves from accusations of effeminacy and illicit sexual behaviour offstage; however, audiences were ultimately left to make their own judgments.

The Kiwis' drag routines may have drawn upon the sensibilities of an emerging queer subculture, both within New Zealand and overseas, but to see them only as that sells them short. As Marjorie Garber has argued, while '[n]o analysis of "cross-dressing" that wants to interrogate the phenomenon seriously ... can fail to take into account the foundational role of gay identity and gay style' it is necessary to also consider the wider cultural fascination with cross-dressing.¹⁵⁶ A close analysis of the Kiwis' drag routines highlights the possibility of the audience member who may have at once seen the female impersonator as a comedic parody of femininity, admired his outfit or singing voice, speculated on his private life, and all the while remained caught up in the militaristic and patriotic sentiment that drove the revue. The *Argus* story that began this chapter illustrates a response to the Kiwis' female impersonators that detected, but did not necessarily identify with, a queer sensibility; but the journalist at the *Argus* still saw the female impersonators as respectable professionals. This example is not intended to be seen as a typical response, if indeed there was such a thing; instead it gives an indication of the kind of responses that were possible. Provided a female impersonator conformed to accepted notions of both masculinity and femininity he could be praised for his performance onstage. Yet, due to drag's cultural association with homoeroticism, these performers were held apart in subtle ways and not considered relevant contenders for the title of 'the last bachelor'.

¹⁵⁶ Garber, p.5.

Conclusion

In 1982 the story of the WWII Kiwi Concert Party was revived by Maurice Shadbolt and Tom Parkinson for the stage show and, later, television special *The Great Kiwi Concert Show*. The show drew on a number of the episodes from the Kiwis' journey through Europe and the Middle East and the fictional troupe's leader, Lieutenant Temple, was clearly based on Terry Vaughan.¹ However, Parkinson insisted that, rather than giving a factual account of the Kiwis, he and Shadbolt 'used the show as an allegory explaining the war through New Zealanders' eyes'.² As a result the Kiwis' history and material was altered to suit the story Shadbolt and Parkinson wanted to tell. With the assistance of Les Cleveland and Jim Henderson, the Kiwis' interpretations of popular songs and sketches from well known musicals were replaced with soldiers' songs that drew on their experience at war.³ All that remained from the Kiwis' original repertoire was their signature numbers 'A Song to Start the Show' and 'Kiwis on Parade'.⁴

Shadbolt worked on *The Great Kiwi Concert Show* at the same time as he was writing his play *Once on Chunuk Bair*. In this Great War drama he presented the Gallipoli campaign as the pivotal moment when New Zealanders developed a distinct national identity.⁵ Both *Once on Chunuk Bair* and *The Great Kiwi Concert Show* have been described as anti-war, but in each instance this alleged anti-militarist sentiment was combined with a deep respect for those fighting men; they were portrayed as ideal New Zealanders.⁶ As a review of *The Great Kiwi Concert Show* stage production noted, the 'bitter anti-war feeling' was mixed with a decent dose of nostalgia and patriotism.⁷ Moreover, in a review of *Once on Chunuk Bair*'s published text, J.C. Ross observed that

¹ Early in the production the army general refers to Temple's impressive musical pedigree, which included six years of study in London. Maurice Shadbolt, 'The Great Kiwi Concert Show', Unpublished Manuscript, p.6, Playmarket, Wellington.

² *N.Z. Listener*, 19 June 1982, p.14.

³ *N.Z. Listener*, 19 June 1982, pp.14–15.

⁴ Shadbolt, 'The Great Kiwi Concert Show', pp.5, 45.

⁵ Maurice Shadbolt, *Once on Chunuk Bair*, Auckland, 1982; Ralph Crane, 'Once on Chunuk Bair', in Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie, eds, *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, Melbourne; Auckland, 1998, p.414; Sebastian Black, 'New Zealand Plays, Playwrights and Theatres: First Productions, January–October 1982', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 1, 1983, p.13.

⁶ Annabel Cooper, 'Nation of Heroes, Nation of Men: Masculinity in Maurice Shadbolt's *Once on Chunuk Bair*', in Robin Law, Hugh Campbell and John Dolan, eds, *Masculinities in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Palmerston North, 1999, p.86.

⁷ *Auckland Star*, 13 February 1982, p.25.

the 'contradiction between questioning why men fight, and simple admiration for the good fighting man, remains intractable'.⁸ In *The Great Kiwi Concert Show* the death of one of the performers provoked another to claim that the Second World War 'was supposed to be a good war, for once. For the right things. But it's just any old war in the end, isn't it? Any old filthy war'.⁹ Elsewhere in the play, however, another performer celebrated the national unity that was believed to be (re)discovered through war: 'why is it we're only one family in a war with pride in ourselves and purpose? Why? When peace comes all this will go'.¹⁰

When Shadbolt and Parkinson's depiction of the Kiwis was taken to New Zealand television screens it provoked censure from those who had seen the actual Kiwis perform during the Second World War. Complaints about the television show's offensive language drew the sharpest criticism and resulted in the six part special being moved from 7pm to 11.15pm on Saturday nights.¹¹ Dean Goffin of Wellington had served as Officer Commanding for the Kiwi Concert Party in Crete. He wrote to the *N.Z. Listener* to say that he believed the series was 'an insult to their integrity as artists', many of whom he knew personally. He claimed they were 'intelligent, articulate, talented, professional musicians and actors' who had 'no need to fall back on the boring barrage of distasteful profanity served up by the script of the present series'.¹² The television series' depiction of New Zealand soldiers' attitudes to their English counterparts brought further reprimand. In the episode that focused on the battle at Crete, the Kiwis were portrayed as angry and bitter due to the lack of assistance from the 'Poms'. Yet Goffin claimed 'at that stage in the war we had only admiration for the courage and skill of the hopelessly outnumbered members of the RAF and gratitude for the gallantry of the Royal Navy. They rescued us in Crete'.¹³ In a similar vein, G.D. Warman suggested 'the scriptwriters visit the graves of our comrades in the desert, or throughout the world for that matter, and see the number of Poms who did turn up and who did not run'.¹⁴

⁸ J.C. Ross, 'Once on Chunuk Bair', *Landfall*, 146, 1983, p.242.

⁹ Shadbolt, 'The Great Kiwi Concert Show', p.97.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.72.

¹¹ *N.Z. Listener*, 24 July 1982, p.120.

¹² *N.Z. Listener*, 31 July 1982, p.10.

¹³ *N.Z. Listener*, 31 July 1982, p.10.

¹⁴ *N.Z. Listener*, 31 July 1982, p.10.

Conclusion

The attempt by Shadbolt and Parkinson to use the Kiwi Concert Party's wartime performances as an allegory to tell a wider story of the war clearly disturbed those who were involved with the Kiwis. When he attempted to write a history of the concert party, Tony Rex claimed his main objective was to set the record straight after the television production.¹⁵ Frank Hoy meanwhile, a violinist with the Kiwis during the war, maintained that the only resemblance between the real Kiwis and those on *The Great Kiwi Concert Show* was 'the name and the portable stage'.¹⁶ Shadbolt, however, was reportedly 'nonplussed' by the criticism *The Great Kiwi Concert Show* faced. He highlighted the positive responses he had received from army officers and stated that if the New Zealand soldiers had abstained from offensive language it 'would make them the first soldiers in human history not to swear'.¹⁷ Parkinson claimed it was their intention to 'present the legend rather than the truth', yet as one viewer pointed out 'myth would be a better word, the show bears as little resemblance to the truth as the average myth does to fact'.¹⁸

The Shadbolt-Parkinson nationalist account of the Kiwis, where support from the British was always found wanting and New Zealand Prime Minister Peter Fraser could not be trusted because he was Scottish, was paired with an assertion that the Kiwis embodied the popular image of the New Zealand soldier. Parkinson went to great effort to assert that the Kiwis 'were fighting men', rather than 'a bunch of guys who frolicked around the desert in drag'.¹⁹ He and Shadbolt depicted the soldiers as hard drinking and foul mouthed; yet their talk of visits to prostitutes was balanced with an instinctive sense of caring and compassion for one another. On the whole they comfortably conformed to Jock Phillips' image of the World War II 'hard man'; rough and crude but kind at heart, 'gentle men, if not gentlemen'.²⁰

The decision by Shadbolt and Parkinson to employ the Kiwi Concert Party to tell a story of rugged and unrefined New Zealand soldiers evoking a shared national identity obscured the troupe's connection with a transnational web of popular entertainment

¹⁵ Cyril Pasco, Kiwi Concert Party, Papers, MS 2002/53, folder three, Auckland War Memorial Museum (AWMM).

¹⁶ Cyril Pasco, Kiwi Concert Party, Papers, MS 2002/53, folder one, AWMM.

¹⁷ *N.Z. Listener*, 24 July 1982, p.120.

¹⁸ *N.Z. Listener*, 19 June 1982, p.14; 24 July 1982, p.10.

¹⁹ *N.Z. Listener*, 19 June 1982, p.15.

²⁰ Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male — A History*, Auckland, 1987, pp.211–12.

and the extent to which they defied restrictive notions of the New Zealand male at war. Paradoxically, as Shadbolt and Parkinson sought to use the concert party to give an account of the war as they understood it, it was the attitudes of people like the men who performed as the Kiwis that were ultimately excluded.

Although Shadbolt and Parkinson accepted they were loose with facts about the Kiwis in order to create a more impressionistic account of war, their work contributed to a larger developing consensus on how the war was to be remembered. In a nuanced reading of *Once on Chunuk Bair*, Annabel Cooper compared the dramatic narrative Shadbolt constructed, with some of the historical narratives he used as sources.²¹ Cooper argued that *Once on Chunuk Bair* was produced within, and contributed to, a particular period of cultural nationalism and that Shadbolt's nationalist gesture was articulated through gender. Britain was not only marked as 'the motherland' but, as the soldiers in his play felt they were undermined by British inaction, Britain was 'figured as whoring mother, deserting and betraying her loyal sons'.²² In this way the 'rejection of Britain' was 'enacted through contempt for the maternal'.²³ In the play, the domestic was rejected along with the maternal and language was defined by the 'New Zealand masculine vernacular'. Shadbolt's vision of a nation created through war was a nation created by men; Shadbolt conflated 'New Zealandness' with a narrow definition of 'New Zealand masculinity'.²⁴

The Great Kiwi Concert Show was similarly tied to this cultural moment. The adventures of the New Zealand Entertainment Unit may not have been as central to the nationalist narrative as the defeat at Gallipoli, but war was still presented as a site where rough and rugged New Zealand men stood in as representatives of the nation. The ways in which the actual Kiwi Concert Party's story was altered to work within this framework is indicative of a wider process whereby accounts of the war are continually being reimagined and reinscribed by different groups and individuals. The story of the Kiwi Concert Party became a site of contestation as the Kiwis' performers and audience, other veterans such as Les Cleveland, and a younger generation of writers such as Shadbolt, all sought to publically express their memory or invented memory of the war.

²¹ Cooper, p.88.

²² *ibid.*, p.94.

²³ *ibid.*, p.95.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.99.

Conclusion

The debate that took place within the pages of the *N.Z. Listener* reminds us that there is no unitary memory of war. The debate also highlights the multiple, and frequently contesting, voices engaged in practices of remembrance.

Considering Shadbolt's interest in the Gallipoli campaign it is perhaps surprising that he and Parkinson made the WWII Kiwis the focus of their stage show.²⁵ But the decision to focus on the troupe from the Second World War reflected a wider trend which saw memories of the Kiwi Concert Party regularly revived long after their final curtain call. This was in stark contrast to the WWI Kiwis and the New Zealand Pierrots or the Diggers, who were largely forgotten. The WWII Kiwis' coherent narrative and recognisable brand not only aided their popularity during their career as a commercial revue company, but ensured their experience could fit within a larger story of the war. Their post-war success encouraged those who had seen them during the war to hold on to that memory. The Diggers, meanwhile, whose connection with the New Zealand Pierrots was less overt, developed a less compelling narrative. The attention they received after they retired from the stage was primarily focused on Pat Hanna.²⁶ Moreover, as the term 'kiwi' replaced 'digger' as the dominant colloquial expression to describe a New Zealand soldier, the Diggers' name provided an overt reminder of a shared trans-Tasman culture that complicated attempts to keep the experience of New Zealand soldiers within a discrete national story.

Reunions and obituaries provided regular opportunities for the public to be reminded of the WWII Kiwis' success. Groups of performers reunited for one-off performances in Auckland in 1960 and Wellington in 1966.²⁷ In 1972 those remaining Kiwis who were living in Dunedin got together for an Anzac Day performance with Vera Lynn.²⁸ In later years the death of prominent members of the troupe were frequently mentioned in regional, and occasionally, national newspapers.²⁹ Not that the

²⁵ Shadbolt had already explored the Gallipoli campaign in his novel *The Lovelock Version* and would later return to it in a work of non-fiction, *Voices of Gallipoli*. Maurice Shadbolt, *The Lovelock Version*, London, 1980; *Voices of Gallipoli*, Auckland, 1988.

²⁶ *Evening Post* (Wellington), 31 January 1974, p.14; *New Zealand Herald*, 2 February 1974, section 2, p.7.

²⁷ Tony Rex, "'The Kiwis': The Story of Kiwi Concert Party, October 1940 to January 1954", Unpublished Manuscript, p.101, MS 1624, AWMM; *New Zealand Herald*, 24 October 1966, p.3.

²⁸ Rex, p.101.

²⁹ A list of obituaries includes; *New Zealand Herald*, 25 July 1974, section 1, p.3 (Charles Bye); *New Zealand Herald*, 16 August 1976, section 1, p.3 (Taffy Owen); *Auckland Star*, 19 January 1978, p.5 (Tom Kirk-Burnnand); *New Zealand Herald*, 17 June 1983, section 1, p.3 (Stan Wineera); *New Zealand Herald*, 2 May 1984, p.2 (Wally Prictor); *New Zealand Herald*, 30 April 1996, section 1, p.4 (Terry Vaughan); *Otago*

performers' public exposure was always favourable. In 1958 Ralph Dyer was charged with indecent assault on a 17 year old male in a Queen Street theatre at an evening screening of 'Female Jungle'.³⁰ Dyer was sentenced to nine months in jail with the magistrate claiming; '[y]outh must be protected from pollution by homosexuals and your offense calls for a deterrent'.³¹

The WWII Kiwis may have been remembered, but they were remembered in particular ways. Although their public standing was largely developed though their career after the war, profiles and obituaries focused primarily on those who had served during the war. These articles consistently stressed that the Kiwis were an army unit, subject to military discipline and ready to fight if necessary.³² In 1991, Terry Vaughan and a small group of remaining Kiwis featured in a segment on the *Holmes* current events television programme. There they relived fond memories of the hardships they faced and the success they achieved. The narrator stressed they 'weren't armchair soldiers', rather they 'carried guns, they were bombed, they were POWed and some of them killed'.³³ The Kiwis' respectability, their respect for rank, and their professionalism fit less comfortably with the constantly changing and evolving image of the New Zealand war veteran. Moreover, the popularity of the British sitcom *It Ain't Half Hot Mum*, which screened in New Zealand from 1976 onwards, encouraged the view that those who performed in concert parties were effeminate cowards, afraid of the front line.³⁴ Therefore, the militaristic and daring elements of the concert party were emphasized in newspaper articles and television shows. The Kiwis' ability to combine elements of the ideal civilian and soldier may have appealed to men and women during the war, and in the immediate post-war period, but for future generations the soldier concert party's past had to be subtly reinvented for those who imagined the New Zealand soldier as a 'hard man' with an appetite for crude entertainment and a disdain for authority.

Daily Times, 25 January 1997, p.4 (Morris Double); *Otago Daily Times*, 24 April 2004, p.39 (Lindsay Brown).

³⁰ *Auckland Star*, 24 May 1958, p.6.

³¹ *N.Z. Truth*, 27 May 1958, p.13.

³² 'The best army show in this war or last', 'Reunion of the 'Originals' of the Kiwi Concert Party', undated and unattributed newspaper clippings, Cyril Pasco, Kiwi Concert Party, Papers, MS 2002/53, folder 1, AWMM; *Otago Daily Times*, 24 April, 2004, p.39.

³³ *Holmes*, 14 March 1991, 2008.0503, New Zealand Film Archive, Wellington.

³⁴ 'It Ain't Half Hot Mum', online, n.p., <http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/itainthalfhotmum/index.shtml>, accessed 30 September 2011; *N.Z. Listener*, 14 August 1976, p.84.

Conclusion

The differences between how the soldier concert parties were interpreted at the time, and how they were reimagined or ignored in later years illustrates the extent to which war exists, not solely as an event to be explained, but as a cultural experience that is continually retold and reshaped. In many ways war was a familiar act and the revival of the concert party format highlights how World War II soldiers turned to the earlier war for guidance on how to cope with the trauma they faced. However, many of the differences between the troupes from the two wars reveal the extent to which the cultural climate shifted in the intervening years. As the two world wars moved into the realm of distant memory they began to take on new significance as those who had lived through the conflict grew older and younger generations found their own meanings in the events. The Kiwi Concert Party continued to be remembered, but over the years the World War I troupes and the civilian tours that followed both wars were gradually marginalized by remembrance practices that responded to a different set of emotions. Post-war performances had allowed veterans to spend a couple of hours reliving memories of the fleeting moments of entertainment they had enjoyed during the war. In addition the post-war shows enabled those who did not go to war to feel involved in the experience. In this way the concert parties became an experience that returned servicemen could share with civilian society. Furthermore, as Richard Fotheringham has argued, the post-war performances can be seen as an act of communication in which soldier entertainers attempted to explain how they felt about their time at war.³⁵ In later years, however, these sentiments became less prominent as remembrance was increasingly centred on solemn Anzac Day parades and sober war monuments. The concert parties were more historically contingent and less concerned with establishing a lasting memory for future generations than memorials and dawn services. Once the more specific sentiments that underpinned the concert parties' popularity passed, the memory of troupes faded.

For scholars examining the ways in which war has been remembered it is crucial to be mindful of the specificity of remembrance. As Jay Winter has highlighted, the multiple voices that are involved in remembrance 'are rarely harmonious and never identical; they do not simply add up to a vague or ill-defined entity known as collective

³⁵ Richard Fotheringham, 'Laughing It Off: Australian Stage Comedy after World War I', *History Australia*, 7, 1, 2010, p.16.

memory or national memory'.³⁶ To this end, Helen Robinson's argument that the Second World War was not followed by mass mourning on the scale of that seen following the First World War, and that for those who served in the Second World War Anzac Day was not as sacred as it had been for the previous generation, is a significant contribution to our understanding of the ways in which the two world wars were remembered.³⁷ However, Robinson's argument that the decreased Anzac Day attendance and the demise of Remembrance Sunday signal a general decline in remembrance is more problematic.³⁸ The concert parties serve as a reminder that remembrance can take a number of forms. War remembrance is not always a solemn ritual, nor is it always concerned with honouring the lasting memory of those who served, and in particular those who died. The extraordinary success of the WWII Kiwis' post-war revues, which saw them touring continually for nearly eight years and enjoy over three million admissions, suggests the public responded enthusiastically to other ways of remembering the war. Scott Worthy's claim that the success of the roll of honour and cenotaph at the Auckland War Memorial Museum 'can be judged by their longevity' is largely sound, but it is important to be mindful of what can be overlooked when longevity is taken as the benchmark for judging an effective form of remembrance.³⁹

Examinations of the two world wars that move away from lofty rhetoric of national legacies and 'hard men' at war to focus on the more specific details concerning individuals and groups who lived through the conflict, present an opportunity to reassess the place of war in New Zealand's historiography. As Caroline Daley has argued, New Zealand historians can write 'more nuanced, pluralistic and imaginative history if we allow the characters in the story to emerge, rather than creating characters like the good keen man to fit a predetermined story'.⁴⁰ This path has been followed in studies such as Charlotte Greenhalgh's research into romance at the cinema in interwar New Zealand. Greenhalgh's work uncovered young New Zealanders who enjoyed a shared romantic culture, but have been obscured by historical accounts keen to show

³⁶ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven, 2006, p.152.

³⁷ Helen Robinson, 'Lest We Forget? The Fading of New Zealand War Commemorations, 1946–1966', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 4, 1, 2010, pp.84–85.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.87.

³⁹ Scott Worthy, 'Communities of Remembrance', p.96.

⁴⁰ Caroline Daley, 'Women Endurance Swimmers: Dissolving Grease Suits and Decentring New Zealand History', *Sporting Traditions: the Journal of the Australian Society for Sports History*, 21, 2, 2005, p.45.

that men and women had separate emotional histories.⁴¹ Greenhalgh argued that men who went to the cinema observed a different model of masculinity from the 'soldiers and rugby players who had such a presence in twentieth-century public culture, and continue to dominate our gender histories'.⁴² However, as this examination of soldier concert party performers has revealed, even the troops themselves did not necessarily conform to common portrayals of soldiers such as Phillips' 'man's man'.

Within the soldier concert parties we see that many soldiers acted out their masculinity in ways more similar to the cinematic leads than the 'good keen man'. The concert party performers were soldiers who wanted to take centre stage; they revelled in the music, lights and attention that went with performance. Furthermore, they were applauded by many of their fellow soldiers for doing so. Looking beyond topics such as war, which hold such a prominent place in New Zealand's historiography, presents an avenue through which marginalized characters from New Zealand's past can emerge. However, this should be combined with a re-evaluation of those characters that at first glance may appear to be part of this masculinist, nationalist framework. Deborah Montgomerie's analysis of letter writing during the Second World War demonstrates the ways that close analysis of primary sources can be employed to rethink grand generalisations about the effect of the war on the nation and the image of the New Zealand soldier.⁴³ This work has built on that approach, highlighting the shortcomings of attempts to use the two world wars to construct a simplistic narrative of national maturation, or a reductive image of the typical New Zealand soldier.

This thesis has analysed the soldier concert parties through three different lenses, exploring their ambiguous relationship with the nation, how they disrupt the image of the 'man's man' at war, and the extent to which the female impersonators' routines simultaneously disrupted and upheld normative notions of gender and sexuality. These snapshots do not simply connect together to give a story of the New

⁴¹ Charlotte Greenhalgh, 'Bush Cinderellas: Young New Zealanders and Romance at the Movies, 1919-1939', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 44, 1, 2010, p.17.

⁴² *ibid.*, p.8.

⁴³ Deborah Montgomerie, *Love in Time of War: Letter Writing in the Second World War*, Auckland, 2005, pp.18, 134. Other texts, however, continue to be published that remain wedded to this cultural nationalist framework. Glyn Harper's recent collection of letters from Gallipoli, for example, reasserted the central place of Gallipoli within New Zealand's narrative of national maturation. Dismissing Peter Gibbons' 'cultural colonization' analytical framework, Harper claimed the creation of a national identity is 'a real process, not an artificial, "colonising practice" as some historians have recently suggested'. Glyn Harper, ed., *Letters from Gallipoli: New Zealand Soldiers Write Home*, Auckland, 2011, p.30.

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Zealand soldier concert parties. Rather, they contribute to a better understanding of the cultural climate that informed New Zealanders' responses to war. Furthermore, they illustrate the extent to which nationalist, masculinist accounts suppress or marginalize contemporary attitudes towards war, masculinity and nationalism. For those who seek to construct a national legacy of a nation born through war or a monument to New Zealand's military service, historical actors who demonstrated an ambivalent relationship with the nation are just as uncomfortable as servicemen who eschew the stereotypical image of the New Zealand soldier. Within the concert parties, the most profound challenge to the notion of the military 'man's man' came from the female impersonators. The attempts to portray the Kiwi Concert Party's female impersonators as masculine soldiers who had to be 'press-ganged' into female roles demonstrates the extent to which diversity within the troupe was suppressed. As the WWII Kiwis' female impersonators paid lip service to their suitably masculine identities offstage, they show that these figures were not themselves free from the burden of masculine expectation. But their ability to simultaneously undermine and reassert received gender norms reveals that a level of playfulness was tolerated, as well as highlighting the public fascination with the ways in which gender boundaries could be disrupted. Moreover, the profound shifts in how the drag routines from the First and Second World War were performed and interpreted illustrates the historical contingency of any gender performance.

Through their adaptation of material from a transnational entertainment culture, connections with other wartime entertainment troupes, and desire to find success overseas, concert party performers did not confine themselves to a national stage. Those who seek to understand these performances, and contemporary cultural life more generally, should follow their lead and look beyond the national framework that dominates so much New Zealand history writing. Shifting our focus so that previously marginalized groups such as the soldier concert parties can take centre stage offers an opportunity to disrupt the nationalist myths that have developed from New Zealand's military service. Rather than use the accounts of individuals and groups to retell stories of New Zealand soldiers punching above their weight and reaffirming their identities as New Zealanders, they should be subjected to close analysis in order to understand how these people interpreted and responded to their involvement in war. This process not

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only garners new insights into meaning of New Zealanders' engagement with the two world wars, but encourages us to rethink the standards by which an event or person's life is deemed to be significant and worthy of recording. Some of Wally Pricor's audience may have been astounded when he took off his wig to reveal himself to be an infantry-trained soldier, but similar revelations are waiting to be uncovered if we remove the restrictive paradigms that inform the writing of New Zealand's past, and allow previously marginalized or distorted experiences and emotions that were part of the cultural landscape to take the stage for a provocative encore performance.

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