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Suggestions for a Maori Studies Syllabus  
for Secondary Schools.

Topic: Maori Music  
by

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MAORI STUDIES SYLLABUS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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TOPIC: MAORI MUSIC.

Information about Maori music is scattered through many books and periodicals and, at present, there is no single, up-to-date, reliable book on the subject, suitable for secondary schools. The following has been written to help meet the need.

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Most New Zealanders can sing a verse or two of such songs as "Po kare kare ana" or "Me he manu rere." But few are aware that there is another quite different kind of Maori music, sung only by Maoris and seldom heard by Europeans. How can this be? And what is this other kind of music like?

Songs such as "Po kare kare ana" — known as Action Songs — are really European except for their words and the actions that go with them, and have very little in common with the songs the Maoris used to sing before Europeans came to this country. In fact, Action songs did not exist at all until the first decades of this century.

Since then they have become so popular that they have largely displaced the older traditional music, especially amongst younger Maoris. Throughout New Zealand, Action Songs continue to be composed and performed by Maori culture groups, Maori concert parties, and in the Maori residential schools. Concert parties performing Action Song have successfully toured overseas, and in almost any record shop can be found dozens of attractively produced L.P. recordings of this kind of music. It is not surprising, therefore, that so few people know of the existence of the older genuinely traditional Maori music, now usually referred to as Maori chant. Fortunately, Maori chant is still performed at Maori meetings, and examples are therefore available for study.

The texts of many of these songs have been in print for more than a hundred years. Governor George Grey published a collection of chant texts as long ago as 1853. Other early scholars who made collections of Maori song texts included Richard Taylor (1855), Edward Shortland (1854), and John McGregor (1893). These men realised that the words of the old Maori songs were really poetry of a very superior kind. The man who did most to bring this to public attention was the famous Maori scholar, Sir Apirana Ngata, who gained a Doctorate of Literature for his collection of songs called Nga Moteatea. His work is being continued today by another well-known Maori scholar — Pei Te Hurinui Jones. But although the great beauty of Maori song texts has long been recognised the same cannot be said of the music. This music sounds very strange to European ears and, perhaps for this reason, was not studied seriously until quite recently

#### WHAT DID EARLY EUROPEAN SETTLERS THINK OF MAORI MUSIC?

At best, except for scholars such as Grey and McGregor, early European visitors to New Zealand were either indifferent to Maori music or were patronising towards it. Captain Cook (Beaglehole 1955:285) said "their songs are harmonious enough but very dolefull to a European ear." Elsdon Best (1952:158) stated of the Maori, "His singing in most cases is monotonous, and by no means pleasing to European ears, however melodious to his." And elsewhere (1925:106) the same author wrote: "The English ear detects nothing to admire in this mode of singing, and we condemn it as monotonous and tuneless." W.H. Lyon (m.s.:18) who went on a canoe journey across Lake Tarawera in 1873, thought Maori songs were "strange and monotonous but not altogether unmusical." Thomas Chapman,

who was a CMS missionary at Rotorua, considered in 1830 (m.s.:33) that the womens' songs were "rude and noisy" and he found their performance "trying and troublesome," while Robert Smith (1862-3:9) wrote of hearing Maoris after dark in all directions "howling at the utmost pitch of their voices which I understand is looked upon by themselves as a musical expression although to strangers it is rather alarming." And J.S. Polack (1838:I:144-145) described a "chorus common among the people" as being sung "in a whining, drawling, disagreeable tone: the soporific effect of which --- soon composed me to sleep."

Active hostility towards Maori music seems to have been confined to a few missionaries such as the Rev. Alfred Brown who objected to the "filthy native songs," no doubt because he was offended by the words. In the main, however, although they seem universally to have disapproved of the war dance, the missionaries appear to have had no great objection to native songs and like most other European observers, thought them simply monotonous and uninteresting and not worthy of serious attention.

#### WHAT DID MAORIS THINK OF EUROPEAN MUSIC?

We can guess that sailors' songs were amongst the first examples of European music to be heard by the Maori. And we know that for some their introduction to European music was through the hymns the early missionaries tried to teach them. What did they think of this new kind of music?

George Forster, who came to New Zealand with Captain Cook on his second voyage, describes how, in April 1773, at Dusky Bay, the Captain gave orders to play the fife and bagpipe and to beat the drum. However the Maoris "entirely disregarded the two first, and were not very attentive to the last." (Forster 1777:149). About fifty years later when the French Explorer Dumont d'Urville visited New Zealand in the Astrolabe this incuriosity was replaced by a keen interest in everything on the ship from the handling of the masts and sails, right down to the master's whistle. According to M. de Sainson who was one of the officers on board, "they crowded around this marvellous instrument which had no doubt a peculiar charm for their ears, for nearly all of them wanted to draw some sounds from it and they were delighted if their attempt was the least successful" (Wright 1950:205). And according to M. Gaimond another officer of the Astrolabe, they vigorously applauded the performance of some French patriotic songs.

Les Enfants de France (Sons of France) and Le Choeur des Chasseurs de Robin des Bois (The Hunting Song of Robin in the Forest) also called forth their approval in no uncertain manner. (Wright 1950:209).

Augustus Earle, however, who lived in New Zealand for 9 months in 1827, found that the Maoris greatly disliked the sound of his violin and he used to play it to drive them out of his house when he grew tired of their company. Of course, as his friends did not fail to tell him, he may have been a poor violinist.

On the other hand, Ensign Best (Taylor 1966:308) found in 1841 that: "An English chorus greatly delighted them and had Te Tipa and another chief had their way, we might have sung to the day of judgement."

John Williams, U.S. Consul at the Bay of Islands from 1842 - 1844, observed that Maoris were curious about the sound of the piano or organ, "--- until their wonder is satisfied --- when they hear the sound of a piano or organ for a few moments they pull and handle it all over, listen for a few moments and immediately become enraptured with its sounds." (Kenny 1956:97).

Dr. A.S. Thomson, writing in 1859, maintained that the Maori had not risen to the level of appreciating the higher forms of music. He conceded that their hearing was acute and their perception of musical time accurate, but he went on to say "the simplest melodies are alone agreeable; delightful music falls upon their ears without exciting emotion, while a noisy drum keeping time gives them pleasure." (Best 1925:126).

And when W.H. Lyon and his companions sang "Rule Britannia" and the "National Anthem" to the paddlers of their canoe in 1873, the Maoris "were greatly amused and no doubt delighted, for like Oliver Twist, they asked for more, but again like Oliver, they didn't get any more for they stopped paddling when we started to sing, and that hardly suited us." (Lyon m.s.:18).

What are we to make of this?

In 1773 the Maoris were indifferent to fifes and bagpipes which no doubt were playing European tunes and they also disliked Earle's violin playing in 1827. They took a keen interest in a bosun's whistle, which can hardly be said to be a musical instrument at all, and their reaction to the piano and organ seems only to have been one of curiosity. They applauded French songs in 1827 and were delighted with an English chorus in 1841 but it is possible they were simply amused, and this certainly seems to have been their reaction to Lyon's rendition of "Rule Britannia" and the "National Anthem" in 1873.

Was Dr. Thomson right when he said Maoris were incapable of appreciating "higher forms of music?" We do know that Maoris at first had difficulty with singing hymn tunes. Their reaction to Samuel Marsden's hymn singing at the Bay of Islands in 1814 seems merely to have been one of uncomprehending wonder.

When he stood up to pray they all said - 'O friends he stands up!' When he commenced singing a hymn, they exclaimed to one another - 'O friends, he opens his mouth!' (Elder 1932:272).

And as late as 1873 one observer wrote of Maori hymn singing as follows :-

Little as I understood the service, it was a very pleasant one to me, till it came to the hymn, and

that I confess upset me a little. I like to hear the strange wild songs of the Maoris as they paddle their canoes over river or lake, but I never heard them sing pakeha [European] music before, and I'm not quite sure I ever wish to again - certainly not in chapel. It was a long metre hymn they chose and the tune they sang it to was as far as I could make out - 'Tallis Canon.' How the ghost of the poor old composer must have shuddered and groaned as they sang!! Each note was dragged out to at least five times its right length and the number of false notes was legion. They sang with loud but tremulous voices, and a good deal of uncertainty I thought. I should hardly like to say positively that they all sang the same tune, though they were quite at one to tune [time?], there were dischords here and there that were increased perhaps, by the harshness of the voices. I have heard the good old tune executed, 'often still oftener' have I heard it 'murdered' but such a 'diabolical outrage' upon it as this, is surely unparalleled! (Lyon m.s.:35).

WHY DID EUROPEANS CONDEMN MAORI MUSIC, AND WHY  
DID MAORIS FIND DIFFICULTY WITH EUROPEAN MUSIC?

The answer to this question is not that Maori music was inferior, or, as Thomson thought, that European music was a "higher form which the Maori could not appreciate because he had not yet reached a sufficient level of development. Anthropologists call such views "ethnocentric." One famous anthropologist, William Sumner, has defined ethnocentrism as "—the view of things in which ones own group is the centre of everything, and all others are scaled or rated with reference to it — each group thinks its own folkways the only right ones, and if it observes that other groups have other folkways, these excite its scorn." It can be seen that both the European view of Maori music and the Maori view of European music were ethnocentric. But, in fact, the two kinds of music were simply different. To European ears, accustomed to an entirely different system, Maori music was "monotonous" and "tuneless." And to Maori ears trained on the Maori music system, European music was merely curious or amusing, or, at first, was not recognised as music at all. It is now known that music is very far from being a "universal language" as once thought, but is learned and culturally transmitted just like food preferences, attitudes to property, modes of marriage, kinship systems, or particular religious and political beliefs. We have only to listen to (say) Chinese, Indian, Arab or Indonesian music to realise the truth of this statement. These are all highly developed kinds of music -- some with histories stretching back for thousands of years -- yet on first hearing we cannot understand them at all. These styles of music are so different from our own that they must be studied before they can be appreciated. It would be very foolish of us to make any value judgements about them until we have done this. And the same is true of Maori music.

## HOW DOES MAORI MUSIC DIFFER FROM EUROPEAN MUSIC ?

- Play recorded example of Maori chant -

It is difficult to say much about the differences without using musical terminology but careful listening will take us some of the way.

### Melody

First listen to the melody. Would you say the steps between notes are large or small? The answer is that they are small and one very seldom hears big skips such as those that often occur in European music. The smallest interval between one note and another in European music is called a half tone or a "semitone." Maori chant melodies have steps confined mostly to one, two or three semitones, or in musical terms, the intervals of Minor 2nd (semitone), Major 2nd (tone), and Minor 3rd (one and a half tones). Now think about the distance from the lowest note in the melody to the highest. This interval is called the "range" of the melody. Is the range of Maori melodies small or large? Clearly it is small. The range of a Maori melody seldom exceeds the interval of a 4th. (two and a half tones or five semitones). Have you noticed anything else about the melody? You might have noticed that it stays rather a lot on one note. This is the intoning note or "tonic." The Maori term for it is the oro. This oro is always in the middle of the range and so the melody keeps moving above and below the oro but always returns to it. Melodies of this kind are called "centric."

### Rhythm

Can you beat time to this song? Probably you will find that you can't. The reason for this is that most Maori melodies do not possess a characteristic known in European music as "metre." Or to put this another way, the time or metre in Maori music keeps changing. But there is nothing haphazard about this. Every time the song is performed it must be performed in exactly the same way so that the singers can keep together. People trained in European music find it very difficult to do this because they are used to a continuing underlying "beat." Maori singers who have been brought up on Maori music have no trouble at all because they have developed a feeling for "additive rhythms" that European musicians lack. Probably Indian or African singers would find Maori music easier to learn than we do.

Often most of the musical interest of a chant lies in the rhythms rather than in the melody. In fact, some song types have no melody at all but are recited almost entirely on one note. Others are really a form of "amplified speech". Many Europeans would not recognize such "recited" or "recitative" songs as music at all. One writer (List 1963) describes them as being "on the boundaries of speech and song."

### Harmony

Did you notice any part singing? If so, it was only because one of the singers made a mistake. Singing in parts is called by the Maoris, rangirua (two melodies) and is considered to be very bad singing. Maori chant is always sung in "unison", which means that everyone sings the same part.

## Form

A melody that repeats over and over with different words for each verse is called "strophic." Do you think Maori music is strophic? If you answered no, you are wrong. Your unfamiliarity with Maori melodies will have prevented you from hearing the repetitions. Listen again carefully and you will begin to hear repeating patterns. One of these patterns is performed by a song leader to mark the end of each repetition of the melody. This leader solo is called the hianga and it is a very important part of the style.

## Performance practice

Most Maori chants are performed by groups of singers who are started off and kept together by a song leader. The leader is responsible for choosing a pitch that will suit the majority of the singers and he or she also sets the pace or "tempo."

Perhaps you noticed that the song you heard had very few breaks for breathing such as occur in European music. This is because the singers aim at a continuous flow of melody and try their best to avoid breathing breaks. During a group performance, the singers either breathe at different times or take breath during the leader solos at the end of each strophe or repetition of the melody. Thus individual breaks for breathing are smoothed over, and the aim of melodic continuity is achieved. In the recitation of ritual incantations this principle is particularly important since it was believed that any break in the flow of sound would cause the spell to fail and bring disaster to the performers. To ensure continuity, two priests performed the incantations alternately, one taking breath while the other recited. And today when two singers perform a chant of any kind, they use the same method. A solo singer has a very serious problem because although he is not supposed to stop singing, even to take breath, songs are usually much too long to perform on one breath. Since he cannot avoid breathing some of the time, the solo singer makes the best of things by continuing for as long as possible on one breath. He then snatches a quick breath and carries on until he is forced by a shortage of wind to breathe again. Since he cannot predict when his breath will run out, the breaks will occur at different points during different performances of the song. And because they are not planned they may even occur in the middle of a word.

Another performance characteristic of Maori singing is the strange groan you may have noticed at the end of the song. It takes the form of an expiration of breath and a descending glide of the voice called a "glissando." In Maori music this signals finality and for this reason can best be called a "trailing cadence" or "terminal glissando." Sometimes it can be heard when an individual in a group stops singing; it nearly always occurs at the ends of verses; and an especially loud and prominent groan occurs at the end of the song. Several early writers noticed the terminal glissando so we can be sure it has been a characteristic of Maori music for at least 200 years. The missionary Thomas Chapman observed in his Journal of 1830 (m.s.:I:33-34) that each verse of the womens' songs ended "with a drawl something allied to a groan." And an even better description is that of George Forster in November 1774: "They descend at the close from c to the octave below in a fall, resembling the sliding of a finger along the fingerboard on



the violin." (Forster 1777:II:478).

### WHY DID MAORIS SING?

This would be a foolish question to ask about European music. We sing because we like to sing. The Maori however always had a reason for singing. Every song had its purpose and it was considered to be a very bad omen if someone sang without a reason.

Let us examine, first of all, some of the recited styles of Maori chant. These are songs, that have no melody such as we know it, but are performed on a monotone or with heightened or dramatised speech intonation.

#### Karakia

One such song type is the karakia or incantation. Most of these are very old. Some are said to have been composed by the captains or priests of the ancestral canoes and others are believed to date back to the Hawaiki or homeland ancestors though usually the composers' names have been forgotten. More than any other song type, ritual karakia had to be performed word perfect since it was believed that any slip would cause the god to punish the person who made the mistake.

Most karakia are performed in a rapid monotone punctuated by sustained notes and descending glides at the ends of phrases. Dieffenbach (1843:II:57) thought the effect was similar to that of the reading of the Talmud in synagogues. The efficacy of the karakia depended not only upon the proper form of the words but also upon the mana (authority, prestige or power) of the person reciting it. In his Old New Zealand (1863), Manning states :

The mana of a priest or tohunga is proved by the truth of his predictions, as well as the success of his incantations which same incantations performed by another person, of inferior mana, would have no effect.

The reputed effect of some of these incantations was remarkable indeed since it was believed that by their use a sufficiently powerful tohunga could perform such feats as splitting stones, withering trees, or causing the thunder to sound.

Not all karakia, however, were performed by priests. As Buck says, (1950:491):

Individuals did not always have a priest standing by to help them out of difficulties which arose in their various activities, so it was part of every person's education to learn an assortment of karakia. Chiefs who had graduated from the houses of learning were well equipped with karakia applicable to every phase of life. Lesser chiefs learned from their older relatives and priests who could teach various things without forming a lodge of instruction. Even commoners learned a number of incantations for their own protection. Thus every individual had a personal stock of karakia for use in everyday pursuits, to cure minor ailments, and to protect against danger.

Karakia of the ritual kind can still be heard today on occasions such as the opening of a meeting house, where tapu placed upon the house during its construction has to be removed; and less important karakia than these are often performed on the marae (village square) as introductions to speeches.

### Patere

These songs are performed in a rhythmic monotone, sometimes by individuals but more often by groups of singers. Most of the recitation is on one note but towards the end of each verse of the song the pitch gradually rises and then falls during the last few words. The patere thus sounds very like a race commentary where the commentator's voice becomes more and more excited, gradually rising in pitch as the horses approach the finishing line, then begins to descend as the first horse crosses the line and is back to conversational level again by the time the last straggler passes the post.

The purpose of the patere was, however, very far removed from horse racing. Patere were composed by women who had been slandered, as a reply to their detractors. Usually the reply took the form, not of denying the gossip, but of listing the singer's ancestors and the important people who were related to her. As Bruce Biggs (1964:46) says:

The implication appears to have been that a person with such noble connections could not possibly have been guilty of the charges preferred.

Often the singer will take her audience on a kind of "genealogical tour" of New Zealand, pausing at each famous landmark to introduce the listeners to the chiefs of the area, or to recount the relevant events of the past. If a woman had cause for real hatred, as, for example, if her husband had been slain by an enemy, she might compose a more abusive, virulent type of patere, known as a kaioaraora, in which she would express such sentiments as a desire to kill, cook and eat her enemies, or to drink their brains.

### Haka

The sight of opposing Rugby football teams performing the haka is a familiar one to most New Zealanders and haka are also popular items in the repertoire of any Maori concert party. Yet there are a number of popular misconceptions about haka. The term is correctly used both for posture dance and for the shouted composition accompanying the dance. Contrary to popular belief, however, the haka was not exclusively a war dance, and nor was it exclusively for men. In former times -- as today -- haka were used for entertainment and for welcome of visitors as well as for preparation for battle. Haka of the first kind were a common amusement of the young people during the long winter months. All-night dances would be held in a large meeting house called the whare matoro or whare tapere and, according to Elsdon Best (1925:46), young men or women who excelled in the hakak were greatly admired and so great pains were taken to acquire free, graceful and well-regulated action. Johannes Andersen in his book Maori Music (1934:311-312)

quotes the legend of Te Ponga and Puhihuia who fell in love through admiration of each others performance in the haka and goes on to say that such incidents were of frequent occurrence.

Arthur Thomson in his The Story of New Zealand, published in 1859 (Vol.1:93) says further that singing and the haka were the amusements of village maiden and young lads on fine evenings. "For this purpose they assembled with flowers and feathers in their hair, and red paint, charcoal, and petals of flowers on their faces." Later (p.195) he says:

As men sung in the open air in the evening, and as maidens assembled to hear the singing, and also to behold the finest-shaped men, there were frequent intrigues on these occasions.

Many early reports mention women taking part in haka, even in the war dance proper.

Polack (1838:I:143) mentions a haka in which he says "the four females in our party acquitted themselves to perfection." Bates (1860:41) describes a moonlight night during which women, while baking scones for his party at a large fire in the courtyard of a pa, "enlivened their labours by occasionally starting up and dancing hakas or native dances." He and his party must have enjoyed the spectacle as he goes on to say "At all the pas we stopped at we used to give the women a few sticks of tobacco to dance hakas which were very amusing." Twenty years later, the price had undoubtedly gone up, since, according to Kerry-Nicholas (1884:87) the Maoris of Te Wairoa coaxed tourists into their meeting house where they would "undertake to sing hymns or dance the haka, [described in a footnote as "a lewd dance in which both men and women take part] according to the inducements held out by the travelling pakeha."

Other accounts also confirm that women took part in haka. Ensign Best in his Journal of 1841 (Taylor 1966:308) comments on the "grace and voluptuousness" of the movements of women who performed "Akas" around his camp fire. The frontispiece of Volume 3 of John White's Ancient history of the Maori depicts bare-breasted women amongst a group of men dancing a haka or derision called a whakatama. And, finally, Augustus Earle (1832:70), who observed Maori war dancing in 1827, was astonished to find that women mixed in the dance indiscriminately with the men, "and went through all those horrid gestures with seemingly as much pleasure as the warriors themselves." From other writer's accounts, it is quite possible that the women he saw were old women who customarily acted as fuglers or leaders in the war dance. Elsdon Best (1925:54) states specifically that both sexes acted as leaders in haka and that women who did so would carry a mere in the right hand. The Rev. James Buller (1878:247) says that old women "disfigured with red-ochre" would act as fuglemen in the war dance, and Arthur Thomson (1859:I:127) also writes of "old naked women daubed over with red ochre acting as fuglers in front of the dancers."

The "horrid gestures" would be those still common in present day

haka, namely foot-stamping, arm-flourishes, body-slapping, hand-quivering and facial grimaces together with rolling or protruding eyes and thrust-out tongue.

Many early authors have described performances of the war dance and almost all found it frightening to watch.

One good description is that of M. de Sainson who came to New Zealand with d'Urville in 1827 and witnessed a haka on the deck of the Astrolabe (Wright 1950:208)

Little by little their bodies are thrown back, their knees strike together, the muscles of their necks swell, and the head is shaken by movements which look like convulsions; their eyes turn up, so that, with horrible effect, their pupils are absolutely hidden under the eyelids, while at the same time they twist their hands with outspread fingers very rapidly before their faces. Now is the time when this strange melody takes on a character that no words can describe, but which fills the whole body with involuntary tremors. Only by hearing it can anyone form an idea of this incredible crescendo, in which each one of the actors appeared to us to be possessed by an evil spirit; and yet what sublime and terrible effects are produced by this savage music! When by a final effort, the delirium of howls and contortions is borne to a climax, suddenly the whole group utters a deep moan and the singers, now overcome by fatigue, all let their hands drop at the same moment back on to their thighs, then breaking the line they had made, they seek the few moments rest which they desperately need.

Was it a battle song that they performed for us? The solemn, profound character of their music might lead us to think so; yet some of the movements seemed to be appropriate to a rendering of a lovers' contest. Be that as it may, whatever their intention, whether it be victory or love that they celebrate in this manner, the fact remains that they have a music of overwhelming force. None could say of such music that it enfeebles men by being effeminate.

Another sailor's description is that of Beechey (1831:303-304) who saw a New Zealand haka performed in, of all places, Tahiti, in April 1826.

While Beechey's ship was at anchor, a whale ship arrived from New Zealand with a party of Maoris on board who later gave an exhibition of the war dance in front of the Consul's house.

The exhibition took place by torch-light, and began by the party being drawn up in a line with their chief in advance, who regulated their motions: which, though very numerous were simultaneous, and showed

that they were well practised in them. They began by stamping their feet upon the ground, and then striking the palms of the hands upon the thighs for about a minute, after which, they threw their bodies into a variety of contortions, twisted their heads about, grinned hideously, and made use of all kinds of imprecations and abuse on their supposed enemy, as if to defy him to battle: having at length worked themselves into a complete frenzy, they uttered a yell, and rushed to the conflict; which, from what we saw represented, must in reality be horrible; the effect upon the peaceable (Tahitians) [Tahitians] was such that long before they came to the charge some of them ran away through fear, and all, no doubt, congratulated themselves that there was so wide an expanse of water between their country and New Zealand.

The war dance proper took two forms. The first was the peruperu which was performed immediately before battle both to intimidate the enemy and as a gesture of mass defiance. Unlike the haka for entertainment, the peruperu was performed with weapons. The second form of war dance — also performed with weapons — was the tutungaarahū or whakatuuwaewae. The purpose of this dance was to find out whether or not the troops were ready for battle. During the dance, the entire party leaped high in the air with both feet off the ground. Old men, who acted as judges, crouched low and looked along the ground. If only one man in 500 was out of time his feet would be seen to be down when all the others were up and this would be taken as an omen of unsuccess. In such a case, the war party would not set out, and, according to Buck (1950:391) the troops would be condemned to more training until their leg drill was perfect.

So far, we have examined karakia, patere and haka and have discovered that, in contrast with Western music, each of these song types served a specific purpose. Karakia were spells or incantations used in every phase of daily living: patere were composed by women in reply to gossip; while haka were used in peacetime for entertainment and the welcome of visitors, and in warfare for arousing fighting fervour or for divining success in battle. Other recited songs included whakaaraara na or watch-songs, and various work songs such as canoe paddling and hauling songs.

The sung styles of chant are those which are not only organised rhythmically like the recited forms, but have definite melodies as well.

The main types of sung chant are waiata, pao, poi and oriori. Each of these can be distinguished on purely musical grounds but, like the song types earlier discussed, can also be classified in terms of song use.

### Waiata

About four-fifths of all waiata are laments for the dead, called

waiata tangi from the word "tangi" meaning "to weep". Most of the rest are waiata aroha or waiata whaiapo (love songs and sweetheart songs) but these too can usually be thought of as laments since nearly all are about lost or unhappy love. The best place to hear such songs, performed in their proper context, is at the tangi or funeral meeting where it is customary for them to be sung after speeches of praise or farewell to the dead.

### Pao

These are little topical songs whose texts are characteristically organised in couplets. Many pao are gossip songs, usually about the love lives of their subjects, and pao of this kind are sung mostly for entertainment. Others, however, have a serious purpose and these can be sub-classified in the same way as waiata. Thus pao poroporoaki are songs of farewell sung on the last night of a funeral, and pao whakautu are answers to taunts. Pao are sometimes sung during speech making to illustrate points of history and one Waikato woman known to the writer has composed many pao on religious or biblical themes.

### Poi

Most New Zealanders are familiar with this dance, with sung accompaniment, in which women swing decorated poi balls attached to strings. Nowadays the accompanying song usually has a catchy European-style melody and such items have become deservedly popular on the concert stage.

Little is known about the origins of the poi. At first, it was probably no more than a game and it is so described in several early accounts.

Thomson, for example, says (1859:156):

Poi is a game played with variegated balls, about the size of large oranges, to which strings are attached. The string is held in one hand and the ball is struck with the other. The hand holding the string is often changed, the string is shortened and lengthened, and the ball is struck from under the arms, and in a variety of ways. Poi is played in a sitting posture, and players sing songs applicable to the time. Much practice is requisite to play the poi ball properly, and when well played, with handsome ball, and a good song, the effect is beautiful.

The songs accompanying these early poi were probably haka, patere and pao and it was only much later that songs began to be specially composed for the poi.

At one time, the game may very nearly have died out, since Elsdon Best, in an article written in 1901 (Best 1901:42), spoke of it as being "revived of late years." Probably he was thinking of the followers of the Maori prophets, Te Whiti and Tohu, in Taranaki, amongst whom the poi had, by this time, become both a symbol of peace and a vehicle of their religion.

Te Whiti was an early believer in "passive resistance" whose followers lived in their thousands in a little village called Parihaka about halfway between New Plymouth and Hawera. Today Parihaka is derelict and almost deserted but in its hey-day it was a neat village with its own bakehouse, and on an elevated site, a large European house which Te Whiti had erected to receive the Governor had he wished to visit Parihaka.

Eventually, although they preached peace, Te Whiti and his uncle Tohu were arrested by Government forces and held without trial for over a year before being returned to Parihaka in March 1883. Te Whiti died there in 1907 after first prophesying that his teachings would be forgotten.

Poi songs and poi dancing were an essential part of the Te Whiti movement, so much so that the people of Taranaki re-worked many of their ancient waiata and incorporated both words and music into the poi. Biblical texts were also adapted to the poi and, according to James Cowan (1910:149-150):

Te Whiti and his chief men at Parihaka village had their oracular utterances and their chants and prayers rehearsed and publicly sung by the poi - women. It was a very pretty sight to watch a large party of these girls and women, their heads all decked with white feathers -- going through the evolutions of the poi, with wonderful rapidity and deftness, to the accompaniment of a very high and wild chant -- for the Prophet of the Mountain did not look with favour on accordeons and mouth-organs and other pakeha innovations.

### Oriori

When the child of a chief or high-ranking warrior was born, it was customary for the parents or grandparents to compose a song for him called an oriori. Because these songs were for children they are usually considered to be lullabies. But the object of the oriori was not merely to lull the child to sleep. It had the further very serious purpose of educating the well-born child in matters appropriate to his descent. For this reason, although the melodies of oriori are often very simple and quite easy to learn, the texts are quite the reverse. Usually, they are full of complex references to tribal myth, history and tradition, to the child's kinship connections, and to other matters that he would need to know in later years. Elsdon Best (1925:121) quotes one text which he says is so packed with such allusions "that a translation of it into English would carry but little meaning, so numerous are the proper names employed, and the explanations that would have to be made."

Of course, oriori are not the only songs in which historical references occur. A study of almost any Maori chant text will show that these songs were one of the means by which knowledge was passed from one generation to the next. In the pre-literate society of the old time Maori, they took the place of books.

## HAS MAORI CHANT CHANGED?

There is plenty of evidence that the words of Maori songs were often changed to make them appropriate to new circumstances. Sometimes such changes were very small, as, for example, in the substitution of tama ("son") for hine ("maiden") in a song that had been composed for a girl but was now being sung for a boy. Or local place names would be substituted in a song that had been borrowed from another tribal area. Sometimes the changes made to a song were so great that very little of the original remained. Such "re-working," however, was simply an easy way of producing a new song or, in other words, was a method of composition. Once produced, a re-worked song would be treated as if it were an original composition.

We have already seen that karakia (incantations) had to be performed word perfect since it was believed that any mistake would be an ill-omen. Eventually this attitude seems to have carried over to other songs, ensuring that they too would tend to be performed and transmitted from one generation to the next without error.

Even today, mistakes in the singing of a waiata are looked upon with dismay and in some areas are considered to be omens of death and disaster. Because of this, many texts have been transmitted down the years with extraordinary accuracy. For example, the text of one song, tape recorded from a Waikato woman in 1963, turned out to have been written down by Sir George Grey about 120 years earlier. A comparison of the two texts showed, that in all this time, not one word had been altered. An even more striking example involves the transmission of words unchanged from Polynesia. This occurs in a karakia quoted by Bruce Biggs (1964:46) which opens with the words "Beat the kawa, water the kawa." Biggs comments:

This appears to have little meaning until it is realised that the word "kawa" refers to the kava plant of Polynesia [unknown in New Zealand], the root of which is beaten to a powder and mixed with water to form a narcotic drink of ritual importance.

We can accept, then, that traditional song texts, or portions of them, can survive for hundreds of years. Is this also true of music?

Clearly this will depend a great deal on circumstances. Where novelty is valued as, for example, in present day Western popular music, one can expect fairly rapid changes in style. "Tiptoe through the tulips" is noticeably different from the latest Beatle record. But where change is not valued, conservation of style is more likely.

Not only was change not valued in Maori music but, according to Dr. A.S. Thomson: "Much care was taken to preserve uncontaminated the airs of ancient songs, for although ignorant of complicated music, many New Zealanders have correct ears for time and tunes." (Thomson 1859:I:195). And Johannes Andersen (1934:191) stated that he more than once saw singers stop during the rehearsal of a melody to make a correction so small that he himself was "hardly if at all" able to notice



the difference.

Another cause of change is the amount of outside influence to which a music style is subjected though, here too, circumstances alter cases. For example, if two styles are fairly similar to begin with, they are more likely to affect one another than if they are not. We have already discovered that the system of Maori music is different from that of European music and we would expect therefore that the latter would not influence Maori music very much. This is found to be the case, and it explains why there should be such a great difference between Maori chant and Action song. The latter makes use of popular European melodies and is appreciated by Maori and European alike. Traditional chant, on the other hand, has few points of contact with European music and remains purely Maori.

It was because of this that Maoris at first had difficulty with European hymn singing. An extract from the Journal of the missionary Richard Taylor, written on April 26th 1839, shows that their first attempts to sing European music sounded more Maori than European.

... the lads are very fond of singing but certainly they have no notion of music. Their native airs embrace no more than three or four notes and they carry on more into the hymns they sing, indeed it is the most discordant singing I have ever heard, no country choir in England being worse ... (Taylor m.s. v2:117).

Other missionary journals show that the missionaries allowed the Maoris to sing hymns to their own tunes. Thus Sarah Selwyn, the wife of Bishop Selwyn, wrote in her Journal of 1845:

The hymns were sung, not with English tunes but after their native notions which are peculiar. The scale did not seem to contain more than three or at the most four notes, the precentor holding fast to one of them as each verse was ended. The choir which was the congregation, after he had howled his note for the first few words of the next verse, all struck in simultaneously and sang (?) to the end, breaking off suddenly, all but precentor who howled on. (Selwyn m.s. v4:66)

Except for the writer's obvious ethnocentrism, this would be quite a good description of Maori waiata singing of today.

So far we have seen first, that Maoris were very careful to sing their songs without error, and second, that the Maori music system was sufficiently different from the European to prevent the latter from influencing it very much. The Taranaki poi songs form an apparent exception to this, but there is a simple explanation.

In spite of Te Whiti's objection to European instruments, a flute and drum band was formed in the 1890s to entertain the young people with tunes such as "The Bluebells of Scotland" and "Gathering the Shells on the Seashore." After Te Whiti's death, this band began to accompany the poi dancing on the marae at Parihaka, and when it was discovered that the band could not play recitative, new poi melodies were composed to suit the band. Although they could be played on European instruments, however, these new melodies were far more Maori than European and except for a much faster "tempo" (speed) had many of the characteristics of waiata. Thus, even here, where the opportunity was greatest, European music failed to influence the Maori very much.

Direct evidence that there has been little change in Maori music since pre-European times comes from the study of very old Maori flutes called koauau. Made of the wing bones of albatrosses, or of wood or human bone, these flutes were five or six inches long and were intended to produce only four or five notes. It is known that koauau were used to accompany waiata singing and were played in unison with the singers. It follows that the scales (series of notes) they produce must be the same as those of the songs they accompanied. These koauau scales have been found to be identical to those of many present day waiata.

However, it is also known that nothing is ever truly static and, however slow it may be, or however many constraints there may be against it, some change is inevitable. And this is as true of Maori music as of anything else.

Since the Maori people left Polynesia for New Zealand, perhaps a thousand years ago, their music has diverged from that of the other Polynesians. Karakia, oriori and haka are probably very ancient song types since similar names appear elsewhere in Polynesia. But the names of other Maori song types do not, and although there are strong similarities, the music of various Polynesian peoples are not identical with Maori music. Certain traits can be traced throughout Polynesia. For example, the terminal glissando turns up on the Polynesian outliers of Rennell and Bellona; in Tonga, Uvea, Futuna, and the Ellice Islands in Western Polynesia; as well as in the Marquesas, Society and Tuamotu Islands of Eastern Polynesia. And more importantly the "building blocks" of music structure are often found to be the same. Recited styles occur nearly everywhere in Polynesia; and in most of Eastern Polynesia, as amongst the New Zealand Maori, few notes, narrow ranges, and "centric" scales are characteristic of the sung styles. However, it is important to realise that although these styles have retained their general characteristics over long periods of time, the details do vary and, to this extent, change can be seen to have occurred.

#### WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

If Europeans had not come to New Zealand, Maori chant would have continued to evolve in its own way, changing very slowly as in the

- past. Now, however, although waiata are still sung, very few are being composed and the process of natural change has come almost to an end.

Some change may come about through the influence of European music but because of the dissimilarity between Maori and European music, such changes are likely — as in the past — to be small. Unless tape-recordings and other modern aids to learning help fix the style, melodies whose notes do not conform to Western major and minor scales could eventually disappear. And in New Zealand, as seems already to have happened in Hawaii, the quality of voice or style of vocal production could become more European and less characteristically Polynesian. The songs themselves, however, would still be recognisably Maori. Few notes, narrow ranges and centric scales have already persisted for hundreds of years and there is no reason to suppose that they will not continue to do so.

A greater danger is that traditional Maori chant will disappear altogether, as the Maori people move closer and closer towards a European way of life. Fortunately there are two trends working to prevent this. Until recently, Maori music had not been studied seriously. But now it is recognised by scholars as worthy of study. Hundreds of tape recordings have been made, the musical style has been analysed, and for the first time many of the songs have been written down in musical notation whereas formerly they could only be passed on by oral tradition. At the same time, more and more young Maori people have become aware of the value of their own traditional chants and are taking the trouble to learn them. If the latter trend continues and the Maori language itself endures, we may yet hope that New Zealand's only indigenous music will not, after all, be lost, but will continue as a living art, meeting the needs of the people who sing it and delighting the hearts of those who understand it.

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