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EXPLORING NOTIONS OF NATIONAL STYLE: NEW ZEALAND ORCHESTRAL MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

by

Glenda Ruth Keam

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Music, The University of Auckland, 2006
ABSTRACT

The question of cultural identity in New Zealand literature, visual art and music has been an important one for many decades. New Zealand’s relative isolation, sparse population, short history and colonial past have all contributed to a heightened national awareness of, and sensitivity to, its cultural condition.

This study aims to explore, with an analyst’s eye and ear, notions of national style through a group of orchestral works. Contemporary critical musicology, which flourished in the 1990s, typically integrates various frames of reference and suggests that analysis be framed in the broader cultural context of a work’s genesis and performance. Examining the ways in which New Zealand’s notions of national identity have affected its artistic production, this study considers claims that the particular environmental conditions of the land have imprinted themselves onto the nation’s music. Furthermore, it investigates claims that New Zealand’s remote and open spaces have generated perceptible effects in the nation’s musical style, while also asking whether the purported importance of the landscape is not actually a myth which sits alongside the nation’s other myths of identity.

The literature regarding notions of ‘musical space’ is surveyed, bringing to light a number of musical elements which may connote space. Seven New Zealand orchestral works, composed between 1976 and 1995 and signalled by the composers as having some connection with the land, are found to share musical features, thus suggesting a national style insofar as ‘landscape’ works from this period are concerned. I then examine the works for ‘space’ elements, to investigate whether there are identifiable elements which connote a ‘sense of space’ in New Zealand music.

A corollary of this belief in a national style is that any influences at work from New Zealand land(scapes) on New Zealand music will produce different musical results from those at work from other land(scapes) on music in other countries. After noting the most prevalent musical elements in the New Zealand works, four comparable ‘landscape’ orchestral works from other countries are also discussed, in order to offset and contextualize the New Zealand findings.

This is the first detailed study of New Zealand music that has investigated national style, concepts of landscape-in-music, and musical space through analytical examination. It thus contributes to the small but growing body of New Zealand musical studies, and to an overall picture of New Zealand cultural identity.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to all of the many people who have helped me with this study. In particular, to Dr Fiona McAlpine for her depth and breadth of thought, rigorous attention to detail, and unfailing patience.

Particular thanks are also due to the New Zealand composers whose works have been put under the microscope, to John Psathas for our many stimulating talks about music, to Mark Menzies for his comradeship and his unique views on music, to Dean Sutcliffe for his clarity of thoughts about music and culture in society, and to Stephen Small for asking me some hard questions.

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And to all the other people who have kept my interest in this subject constantly alive, thank you. I wasn’t bored for a minute.
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<table>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ANZ</td>
<td>Art New Zealand</td>
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<td>JMT</td>
<td><em>Journal of Music Theory</em></td>
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<td>MiNZ</td>
<td><em>Music in New Zealand</em></td>
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<td>NZH</td>
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<td>NZL</td>
<td><em>New Zealand Listener</em></td>
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* Note: One citation refers to material found only in the 1st edition of this publication from 1991, and does not reappear in the 2nd (revised) edition. In that particular instance the abbreviation OHNZL has not been utilised in the footnote.
INTRODUCTION

The question of New Zealand cultural identity is a hot topic; indeed to the visitor or the returning New Zealander it can appear to be a national obsession. Certainly, when I returned to New Zealand in 1994 after spending nearly nine years living in the United Kingdom, I found a country whose national media and advertising companies saturated their output with the words ‘New Zealand’, ‘New Zealander’, ‘kiwi’, ‘our people’ and the omnipresent ‘we’. For a time I was left somewhat bewildered. Was the nation seeking constant reassurance that it counted on the world stage? Did ‘we’ really believe that the New Zealandness of something or someone was of prime importance? Was this the proudest nation, or one with the lowest morale imaginable? Was its morale so low that it habitually acted defensively, as a result of a deeply ingrained ‘cultural cringe’, or was it just so far away from everywhere else that it simply didn’t think the rest of the world counted any more?

New Zealand sociology lecturer Avril Bell interprets New Zealanders’ obsession with who they are as a sign of insecurity: ‘Because we are so unsure of ourselves, we tighten our grasp on the characteristics we believe are unique.’ This national self-consciousness is not limited to the everyday or the mundane, it is commonly applied to everything, including music. In an attempt to specify New Zealand qualities in music, many music critics and commentators have made rather loose references to a ‘sense of space’ in the music, partnered with claims for the music’s evocation of—or response to—the New Zealand landscape. Composers, too, often assert that the landscape has influenced their work, and make claims for a distinct New Zealand spaciousness. There is a common view that the wide open spaces of New Zealand have somehow subconsciously affected composers, while they in their formative years or while they are writing, and that the results may be clearly perceived in their music. There have, however, been few attempts at explaining where, within the music, these spaces and effects of landscape might be located. As a returning musician I found the claims too loose, lacking in obvious or direct connection to the music. A more analytical approach to the question of New Zealand identity in music seemed overdue.

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1 A. Bell interviewed by staff reporter Amanda Spratt, Herald on Sunday (NZH), 22 May 2005, p.23.
The face of music analysis changed and diversified in the 1990s, placing stronger emphasis on the human element. Critical musicology in the new environment draws on a range of disciplines and frames of reference to inform its methodology, broadening the musical analysis by reframing and repositioning it in a wider cultural and social panorama. The principal studies of New Zealand music which predate this one do not have cross-disciplinary backgrounds of this type, and I am appreciative of those musicological studies which have served as exemplary models for focused musicological research while drawing on a wide range of disciplines in support of their inquiry.

Music analyst Kofi Agawu has explored the ways in which the rise of so-called ‘new musicology’ has affected musicologists’ idea of where analysis belongs in a study of musical works. Noting that ‘not all branches of musicology are directly concerned with the experience of music’, Agawu explains that ‘attending to the archive [...] of musical works is [...] impossible without analytical mediation...’ and that most analysts are concerned with ‘inquiry into the structure of “the music itself”’. Pointing out that comprehensive guides to analytical techniques did not appear (in English, at least) until the 1980s, he reminds us that when, in the 1990s, the position of analysis in musicological inquiry came to be challenged and the gap between the musical and the extra-musical came to be problematized, it was a young discipline which was being challenged in this way.

‘New musicology’ is characterized by Agawu as ‘eclectic and selectively pluralistic’ and explained by Lawrence Kramer as too diverse to be considered a school. What new musicological approaches appear to suggest is that one may no longer consider

2 Lawrence Kramer in particular has brought many areas of research close together for the purposes of positioning musicological findings; for example in ‘The Mysteries of Animation: History, Analysis and Musical Subjectivity’, Music Analysis, v.20 no.2, July 2001, pp.153-178 he addresses the relationship between music and subjectivity, and in order to do so he considers Jakob Grimm’s theories regarding humans and language, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s theories regarding speech and song, Jacques Lacan’s and Slavoj Zizek’s psychoanalytical theories, Leo Tolstoy’s thoughts about Frederic Chopin’s music, and G.W.F. Hegel’s thoughts about interior resonance and listening.

3 These models include, for example, writings by Susan McClary, such as ‘Narrative Agendas in ‘Absolute’ Music: Identity and Difference in Brahms’s Third Symphony’ in Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship, ed. R. Solie. Berkeley, 1993, pp.326-344. They also include Nadine Hubbs’s The Queer Composition of America’s Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity. Berkeley, California, 2004; Leo Trietler’s ‘Language and the Interpretation of Music’ in Music and Meaning, ed. J. Robinson, Ithaca, 1997, pp.23-56; and Andrew Mead’s ‘Physiological Metaphors and Musical Understanding’ in Journal of Music Theory, v.32, no.1, Spring 1999, pp.1-20.


5 ibid., pp.297, 298.

6 ibid., pp.298-299.

7 ibid., p.300.

musical works as having ‘nuggets of identity’ or ‘irreducible essences’; there are no ‘single grand narratives’, but rather we must consider works to be situated in a constructed, fragmented, and relative framework. Yet this does not tell us how to situate analytical findings, nor indeed how to perform analysis in ways that are free of conventional bias; in particular, it does not tell us how best to use the ‘surplus of detail that theory-based analysis produces.’

Agawu suggests that a range of innovative and productive approaches to this question are exemplified in work by musicologists not normally considered ‘new musicologists’ as such, yet whose work has broken new ground and developed new models; these studies include David Lewin’s diverse writings, Charles J. Smith’s considerations of multiple meanings through the harmonic dimensions of a work, and David Lidov’s exemplification of meaning formation through musical repetition. Thus analysts have not been entirely unresponsive to calls for musicology to be socio-culturally positioned. Likewise, in this study I am also concerned with positioning analytical findings from a body of work in ways which contribute to an understanding of the music as social discourse, and in doing so through attention to the detail of musical expression and experience.

Before this study was undertaken, the most substantial attempts at identifying New Zealand musical character through analysis—especially the music of Douglas Lilburn—had been made by Philip Norman in his PhD dissertation ‘The Beginning and Development of a New Zealand Music: The Life and Work (1940-1965) of Lilburn’, by Lee Martelli in her MMus dissertation ‘Solo Piano Music in New Zealand in the 1960s’, and by Fiona McAlpine in a number of papers and articles which examined Lilburn’s style, particularly his pitch processes.

General concern with New Zealand musical style may be traced back to Lilburn, whose music and thinking strongly influenced the New Zealand compositional scene. When he presented his talk (later named *A Search for Tradition*) at the first Cambridge Summer School in 1946, Lilburn precipitated a widespread desire amongst those New Zealand composers who wished to find a way in which their music could be relevant to New Zealand society and its communities; evidently, Lilburn was addressing questions that had been burning in many New Zealand composers’ minds.

10 ibid., p.304
11 ibid., pp.305-306.
In New Zealand, there had been a strong nationalist movement in visual art and literature which gathered strength in the 1930s, and Lilburn’s call to composers in 1946 was in accord with this general movement. The painters’ response to the harsh New Zealand light and the appending of ‘signatures of place’ to such works appear matched by composers’ responses to ‘a sense of space’ and the positioning of New Zealand landscape centre-stage. By the 1970s, in many areas of national culture including visual art and literature, the nationalist agendas seemed to be fading away. Yet I found it necessary to consider the possibility that, at least up until the mid-90s, they had not altogether faded in music. Lilburn stressed the need for a local tradition in music, together with the perceived risk to national identity if New Zealand composers were to acquiesce to those international forces that would create a globally homogeneous music. After nearly half a century, these ‘risks’ were still being avoided, and not just by composers but also by local commentators; the criteria by which New Zealand works were being evaluated were not being used in any parallel considerations of music from elsewhere.

Seeking to reveal ways in which New Zealand composers might develop locally relevant approaches to composition, and in accord with New Zealand artists of other disciplines at that time, Lilburn stressed the importance of the landscape in contributing to the shape of a unique national musical tradition. This idea was not entirely new—both Percy Grainger and Ralph Vaughan Williams had quite obviously influenced Lilburn’s thinking along these lines—but through his own efforts and passionate beliefs, combined with his presence in New Zealand, Lilburn had a far more direct and powerful effect on the country’s compositional attitudes. These attitudes have gradually evolved, but their legacy has persisted in various guises beyond the end of the 20th century.

In 1995 it seemed to me that the time had come for the question of New Zealand musical style to be re-examined through detailed analysis together with a detailed picture of the notional constructs of place and identity which surround the music’s production, focusing on key notions such as landscape and space while acknowledging that these things are always in a state of flux. Targeted analysis is thus used in order to explore the ways in which New Zealand musical style may be identifiable, be partly identifiable, or may not be identifiable at all in the music and not merely in a rhetoric which surrounds it.

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12 The phrase ‘signatures of place’ was employed by Francis Pound for an exhibition of place-related New Zealand painting at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth, New Zealand, in 1991.
In order to discuss national style in music, it is also necessary to consider what the word ‘style’ can mean. Writing in 1985, the musicologist Naomi Cumming considered the extent of this question within the context of musicology and compared a number of views from across the 20th century.\textsuperscript{13} Examining Arnold Schoenberg’s distinction between ‘style’ and ‘idea’, she concluded that in his definition ‘style’ is somewhat superficial, describing the way a musical idea is presented and borne in the work, as well as the ways in which the various ‘ideas’ are disposed towards each other, whereas a musical ‘idea’ was synonymous for Schoenberg with such terms as ‘theme’, ‘melody’, ‘phrase’ or ‘motive’.\textsuperscript{14} Harmony was also considered by Schoenberg to be a peripheral (and thus stylistic) aspect of a work.

Cumming also considered Hubert Parry’s concept of style as ‘the general flavour or aspect of organization. [...] the outward effect of form in detail [...] yet not form but something which subtly emanates from it.’\textsuperscript{15} This integration of ‘style’ and ‘form’ was found by Cumming to be common also to other approaches by Leonard B. Meyer, Edward Cone and Jan La Rue. The idea of creating stylistic categories in order to consider together a group of works which have something in common—be that their composer, their genre, or perhaps their country of origin—requires a more complex or expansive notion of style in order to embrace the inevitable divergences which occur within such groups of works.

Cumming has compared La Rue’s 	extit{comparative} purpose—whereby only exceptional or distinctive traits are sought and common traits discarded—and Charles Rosen’s ‘approach to the relationship between the normative and individual sides of the concept of style’, and found Rosen’s view opposed in that instead of focusing on qualitative differences he considers qualitative similarities between works to be the qualifying criteria for inclusion in a particular ‘style’.\textsuperscript{16} Meyer has taken this assessment of similarities further, devising hierarchical levels of identity between works in order to compare works which share the same musical syntax. These assessments of stylistic groups and identities rely on the gathering of recurrent or invariant aspects as that which defines a style, or levels of style. Both approaches—a consideration of similarities as well as a consideration of differences—have, as I shall explain later, contributed to the ways in which New Zealand style is considered in this study.

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As a background to an analysis-based stylistic exploration, and in keeping with the methods developed by critical musicology, I have taken a fairly wide view of New Zealand’s cultural history in order to explore more fully the pressures and forces at work on the country at large, and to understand the context of statements made by leading figures in the country’s artistic life over the past few eventful decades. In particular, I have drawn out an analysis of the cultural myths which pervade the cultural scene, and surveyed some of the claims for influence on—and representations of—land and landscape which have appeared across the range of New Zealand’s artistic output, suggesting that landscape sits alongside other New Zealand ‘myths of identity’. This cultural survey is relatively short and primarily intended as background and support for the musicological inquiry which follows, yet in itself I hope it will also offer a new contribution to the wider field of New Zealand studies.

This cross-disciplinary picture of cultural identity, which includes a survey of the relative importance of landscape notions across New Zealand’s art forms at large, provides background for a consideration of the cultural context in which New Zealand’s musicians work. Additional contextualization also requires discussions of nationalism in music, landscape in music, and the ways in which the conscious and the subconscious play a part in composerly intentions and decisions, all of which combine to provide a detailed and wide-ranging background for the analytical work which follows. I have also drawn comparisons between New Zealand and Australia at certain points in the first two chapters of this study, as the two countries share a similar post-colonial history, language, and position in the South Pacific, with comparable historical and race relations issues concerning First Peoples and European colonization.

Chapter 3 provides another essential block of supporting material for the consideration of New Zealand style via its broad-based inquiry into the nature of musical space, drawing on work from a number of relevant disciplines including physics, psychology and philosophy. By considering writings on the subject by overseas commentators and composers as well as considering New Zealand writings about (and claims for) space in New Zealand music, concepts of the ‘sense of space’ in New Zealand music are investigated and brought into a wider frame, whereby suggestions for there being ‘more’ or ‘less’ space are replaced with some identification of which aspects of musical space appear more or less applicable to New Zealand musical output. One may not be able to arrive at a precise definition for the New Zealand ‘sense of space’, but it is possible to propose a bundle of musical characteristics which appear to connote spaciousness in New Zealand music. This bundle, in turn, provides further material for the analytical work which follows from Chapter 4.
In choosing a group of works which could be examined analytically to provide information about style, a number of considerations were taken into account. First, in order to focus on New Zealand works which were most likely to encapsulate or exhibit this New Zealand style it was important to select works written by composers who had spent most of their creative life in New Zealand, and who composed the works while living here. Thus it was necessary to exclude a few very interesting possibilities such as Gillian Whitehead’s *Resurgences* (1989), on the grounds that Whitehead left New Zealand in the 1960s and did not return to make New Zealand her principal home until the mid-1990s.

Because New Zealand musical style is believed by many to be influenced or partly instilled by the landscape, then it should follow that the national musical character to which the landscape is reputed to be a contributor would be particularly abundant in those works which have an acknowledged or overt connection with land or landscape in some way. The connection may be to a specific landscape or a more generalized concept of the land, to an actual geographical entity or an imagined one; the range of notional connections has proven to be remarkably varied. I have selected works which carry such connections via their titles and associated commentary from the composer, while ensuring a spread—geographic, stylistic, and aesthetic—of works and composers.

It has also been necessary, in order to make collective observations of any substance, to focus the analysis on works which come from a similar time period and genre of composition. Comparisons across genres will always tend to say more about the differences between the genres than between the particular works. Orchestral music was chosen—including works for chamber orchestra—as the medium offers the widest possibilities for timbral exploration within acoustic music, and may thus present a more comprehensive range of composerly techniques for timbral evocation of, or responses to, the landscape.

One might at first think that a worthwhile investigation into New Zealand music could perhaps focus on the differences between landscape-influenced music and music which is free of influence from the landscape, however there is a flaw with any such investigation: part of the treasured belief in the power of the landscape on the nation’s musical output is the belief that the influence operates to some extent in ways which are unavoidable, sometimes subconscious, and thus not necessarily recognized or understood by the composer at the time of composition. If this is the case, then there can be no such thing as entirely landscape-free New Zealand composition, so distinctions between New Zealand landscape music and New Zealand non-landscape music might as well not be attempted.
Much as a wider survey across a range of New Zealand musical styles, genres and types could have provided more information, the analysis and the sifting of analytical results would have proven unwieldy. Rather, I have chosen to illustrate and explore the cultural construct called ‘landscape’. I selected the period 1976-1995, partly because a 20-year period effectively represents a generation in the life of the New Zealand composition scene, partly because John Rimmer’s *The Ring of Fire* (1976) stands out as one of the more significant New Zealand works of its time, and not least because I embarked upon this study in 1996.

Statements about New Zealand’s particular style (in any area, not just in music) often seem to be made in order to set New Zealand apart, and make claims for its special qualities. When I examined the small field of existing detailed research on the subject of New Zealand style in music I found it had been restricted to an exploration of New Zealand works alone. This study recognizes that the identification and recognition of prevalent features found in a group of New Zealand works may go some way to exploring the nation’s style (at least as it is manifest in music of that time period and within that genre), particularly if one takes Rosen’s approach to shared traits as the identification of style. The consideration of (Rosen’s) similarities and (La Rue’s) differences would both appear to be informative, however, and it is only by using comparisons, as suggested by La Rue, that any claims can be viably suggested for a particularly New Zealand style. If Avril Bell (above) is correct in surmising that New Zealanders are concerned with what is specially of New Zealand then claims made for a particular New Zealandness carry an implicit structuralist ‘us/not-us’ opposition. Thus La Rue’s ‘differences’ may be considered important, and so I chose finally to highlight the New Zealand works by situating them in an extra-New Zealand context.

For the comparison, then, alongside the seven New Zealand works which I have investigated, there are four works from Australia, England, the United States and Canada. Comparisons with a work from each of these countries seemed most appropriate for a first foray into such comparisons, on the grounds that Australia, the United States and Canada share much of New Zealand’s ‘new world’ social and historical background, and England was—by many New Zealanders—considered until recently to be the ‘mother country’.

Like the New Zealand works, the works for comparison are all orchestral, all have land(scape) references in the title or the extra-musical considerations of their composition, and were written between 1976 and 1995. It is not intended that this be considered a scientific comparison, with experimental set and control group, as the number of works is necessarily too small for the results to be treated as statistical data.
Rather, the comparisons with overseas works are intended to give a sense of how the features in the New Zealand works sit alongside comparable non-New Zealand works, particularly since comparisons of this type have hitherto not been attempted in any detail for notated music from this country. In this respect, the research is again breaking new ground in New Zealand classical music studies, and mirroring a comparative analytical style more common in such areas as ethnomusicology and popular music studies.17

The most valuable resources for insights into New Zealand compositional behaviour and the local musical scene are the Composers Association journal and yearbook, CANZONA, dating back to the Association’s beginnings in 1974, and William Dart’s Music in New Zealand, a semi-regular journal-magazine which first appeared in 1988. The latter has proved a particularly rich source of historical material and critical opinion, and has been a key resource in my exploration of the nation’s musical scene.

For the pitch analysis I have used the nomenclature from Allen Forte’s Set Theory as the most widely recognized method in post-tonal music for demonstrating pitch relationships and groupings. Rhythmic analysis has been performed on a case-by-case basis, partly due to there being no standardized procedure for rhythmic analysis. As certain rhythmic, durational and formal features (such as Fibonacci relationships) appeared in a number of the works, these in turn became targets for my inquiry. As well as noting any other salient features which seem prevalent, I have also sought in each work those characteristics which might connote space or spaciousness, as discussed in the survey of musical space presented in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 4 I present detailed analyses of the seven New Zealand works, and in Chapter 5 I list those features which are identified by these analyses and note the extent to which—and the ways in which—each of these features appear in each work. From these features, I compile a preliminary profile of New Zealand style. Elements which might connote space, as identified in Chapter 3, are also sought in the New Zealand works. In Chapter 6, I consider the non-New Zealand works, looking at occurrences of the features enumerated in the New Zealand style profile as well as a parallel consideration of their musical spaciousness.

I do not claim that this investigation is a rigorous scientific survey, as its sample size is necessarily very small, and music does not readily lend itself to such a scientific model. This study does, however, provide a new approach for the examination of cultural

elements in New Zealand music by virtue of its grounding in both music analysis and the principles of critical musicology, together with its being enhanced by comparisons with works from elsewhere.

There are many other avenues which could be explored from the points raised in the first three chapters of this work, but for practical reasons were not be pursued in this study. For example, a fruitful development of the work comparing the New Zealand and Australian cultural and musical situations is suggested by the material presented in the first two chapters. Furthermore, as compositional approaches and attitudes develop and music technologies expand, it is inevitable that current definitions of musical space will continue to be challenged; the material in Chapter 3 may contribute to further work in that area.

In the years since 1996, during which a ‘new generation’ has arisen in the New Zealand composing scene, varying compositional styles have proliferated, and there has been a remarkable increase in the capabilities of performers who regularly perform contemporary music. The establishment of such groups as the professional contemporary chamber ensembles 175 East in 1997, and Stroma in 2000, as well as the continued commissioning of works by such orchestras as the Auckland Philharmonia from adventurous younger composers alongside more established figures, have provided a rapidly changing environment. One might be tempted to assume that prior to this period of ‘new proliferation’ New Zealand music might be neatly summed up by the references to landscape and space which litter the small field of critical writing on the subject. My findings show a less monolithic vision of New Zealand composition before 1996, revealing a more nuanced picture of the forces at work on New Zealand’s composers through the preceding two decades.

It was not my goal to find unequivocal answers to questions of cultural identity in New Zealand, nor indeed to the question of space in music, but rather to provide a deeper understanding of recent New Zealand orchestral music as a richly varied body of work which arises from the nation’s cultural life, and which is manifest in the nation’s cherished beliefs about that music. In the end, it is—and should be—the music which is central to the active listening experience. By exploring the contexts in which the nation’s music operates, asking subsequent questions, and attempting an unblinkered search for the range of possible answers in ‘the music itself’ as well as in the statements and beliefs ‘around’ the music, I hope to have provided a useful resource for those seeking further understanding in this area.