

## Foreword

Tena koutou katoa!

Over the past several years there have been a great many exciting developments in Aotearoa / New Zealand performing arts. One example is the recent prominence of New Zealand and success of New Zealanders in the realm of mainstream Hollywood blockbuster films, as evidenced by *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *The Last Samurai*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and others. Such films, have seen this relatively small nation enjoy a profile in a global industry, which is disproportionate to the size of its populace. Of particular note in the case of the film industry are the successes of films based on local stories and culture. With the exception of the biographical, *The World's Fastest Indian* (about NZ racer Burt Munro), most of the other NZ films that have done well in the last four years have been primarily based upon the stories, cultures, and experiences of Māori and Pacific Islanders,<sup>1</sup> including *Whale Rider*, *No. 2*, *River Queen*, *Sione's Wedding*, and the Oscar-nominated short film *Two Cars, One Night*. All of these have received much critical acclaim at home and abroad, and give some credence to the statement found on the New Zealand Film Commission's website asserting that "it's never been so hip to be brown."<sup>2</sup> Keeping in this same vein, if "brown" film, TV, music, dance, etc. have in the past been poorly supported and appreciated by New Zealand and the rest of the world, now, more than ever, it seems the tide has turned and their time has come. As a result, and given my background working in Māori and Pacific Island performing arts, my opening comments to this E-journal are focused on key developments in this sphere.

The recent surge in prominence and success of "brown" NZ films has, to varying degrees, been mirrored in other areas of the performing arts. The last several years have seen a number of popular and acclaimed stage productions such as *Maui – One Man Against the Gods*, the musical stage version of *Once Were Warriors*, *Malaga*, and *The Sons of Charlie Paora*, which have demonstrated significant local and international interest in Māori and Pacific Island (PI) theatre. While, in popular music and dance, distinctive Māori artists such as Moana & the Tribe, WAI, Hinewehi Mohi, and (NZ) Pacific Island groups such as Te Vaka and The Feelstyle, have enjoyed substantial international successes, showing that there are significant audiences out there for Māori and Pacific Island music and dance forms that integrate both contemporary and traditional elements. At the local level in recent years there has been a huge leap in the number of available recordings by Māori and Pacific Island artists who, as a whole, enjoy increased prominence and a greater share of the local market than in years past. In the realms of contemporary dance, avant-garde and cabaret, the international success of Black Grace, MAU and Mika Haka respectively,

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Pacific Islanders and Pacific Island performing arts are referring to the well-established communities that have emigrated from island Polynesia, and which form an important part of the social and cultural landscape (e.g., Cook Islanders, Samoans, Tongans, Niueans, etc).

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/film\\_catalogue/features/latest\\_feature\\_films/SIONE%27S\\_WEDDING\\_559/about.aspx](http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/film_catalogue/features/latest_feature_films/SIONE%27S_WEDDING_559/about.aspx)

have demonstrated the opportunities that can be seized by Māori and Pacific Island performing artists working in these realms.

There have also been significant recent developments in the field of television. Television New Zealand (TVNZ) airs a variety of Māori programmes each week, as well as the *Tagata Pasifika* programme, which is the main programme covering Pacific Island subjects (outside of the recent popular and irreverent animated series *bro'Town*). Some more mainstream programmes, such as long-running TVNZ soap opera *Shortland Street*, though not exclusively Māori or PI-focused, have a high proportion of Māori and PI characters and themes. Furthermore, last year TVNZ broadcast a miniseries, *The Market*, about a Romeo and Juliet type romance between a Māori and a Pacific Islander. A development of tremendous significance, is the recent introduction of the Māori Television Service (MTS), which broadcasts a minimum of nine hours each day. Though it airs some archival material as well as some international indigenous programmes, an enormous amount of new Māori programmes suddenly needed development in order to fulfil the demands of the 63-plus hours broadcast per week. This has seemingly spawned a significant mini-industry of its own, and has created extensive work opportunities for Māori producers, directors, actors, writers, etc., while apparently keeping a number of Māori production houses very busy.

Promotion of Māori language and culture are core goals of the Māori Television Service, and as such, one of its key functions is educative. Now that learning programmes, set in a Māori environment and involving total Māori language immersion (or bilingual including English), are available from early childhood through to graduate level, Māori television serves an important support function by providing programming that is linguistically and culturally relevant to this important, and rapidly-growing section of the population. If at previous moments in history various people have felt compelled to make dire pronouncements about the pending demise of Māori language and culture, from where I sit,<sup>3</sup> these crises appear to have been significantly averted – thanks to the long, determined struggles of many people over time. While MTS can't be credited with the resurgence of Māori language and culture, it has quickly become an important contributor to the current cultural renaissance, and it may be said that it helps to further integrate (but certainly not assimilate) Māori culture into the mainstream. MTS – and related TVNZ programming – safeguard Māori language, culture and society – and the many exciting developments taking place within them – from being relegated to the periphery of NZ society thanks to their regular accessibility on the ubiquitous box found in most people's living rooms. While some non-Māori may not watch such programming, there are many others that value and enjoy it, so increasing their awareness and understanding of contemporary Māori culture. For Māori who are not fluent in the Māori language, MTS provides them with entertaining learning programmes, for Māori who are fluent, MTS provides them with a range of news, entertainment and documentaries in Māori and English.

---

<sup>3</sup> Given my vantage as a Jewish American married to a Māori American, and who has now resided in New Zealand for five years, and working throughout that time at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, in a role focused on supporting tertiary programmes in Māori performing arts (which also incorporate Pacific performing arts).

Though NZ Pacific Islanders may not currently benefit from a service similar to the Māori Television Service, a notable degree of total language immersion education, nor from equal levels of government funding support for arts and culture, hopefully such opportunities will increase over time.<sup>4</sup> What is certain is that there is largely an absence of Māori or Pacific Islanders undertaking higher studies in the performing arts (particularly at graduate level), and consequently, there is a paucity of Māori and PI candidates who are well-qualified to teach and manage “culturally-based”<sup>5</sup> tertiary programmes<sup>6</sup> or to teach culturally-based performing arts as part of the NZ Arts or Nga Toi Curriculum at primary and secondary levels.<sup>7</sup> Similarly there is a considerable scarcity of publications and resources focused on Māori or NZ Pacific Island performing arts,<sup>8</sup> even fewer of which have been written by Māori or Pacific Island peoples themselves. Only a limited number of publications analyse or even convey the vibrancy of contemporary Māori and Pacific Island performing arts cultures or the changes happening within them. Hence, as a result of all of these factors, in spite of what may justly be named a renaissance of NZ Māori and Pacific Island cultures, there is a lack of corresponding scholarship which can further its’ progress in the arenas of performing arts education and research. This means that there is also a lack of people who can work to further integrate Māori and Pacific Island performing arts into “mainstream” university departments of music, dance, drama, etc., which will see them remaining primarily the province of anthropology and area studies programmes as well as of institutions like Māori wānanga. My assertion and untested assumption is that there is a correlation between the extent to which such key local forms of music and dance are accepted into university departments of music and dance, and the extent to which Māori and Pacific Island culture is accepted by the mainstream of society.

Particularly given some of the gaps in Māori and PI performing arts research and educational resource publications, the present journal, *Research in New Zealand Performing Arts: Nga Mahi A Rehia No Aotearoa*, is a significant development, that makes some welcome new contributions to the scholarship pertaining to Aotearoa performing arts. I sincerely hope that this will encourage the publication of new scholarly works and educational resources to add to what presently exists, and further

---

<sup>4</sup> Much of the added support that Māori receive, such as the governmental establishment and support of MTS not to mention the funding of wānanga are comparatively recent developments, perhaps fairly tentative and capable of changing with the next government. Given the special status of Māori as the tangata whenua (“people of the land” - indigenous people), and given the governmental obligations embedded in the Treaty of Waitangi, it is logical and unsurprising that Māori would receive a greater level of this type of support at this point in time.

<sup>5</sup> Shorthand for, in this case, programmes focused on studies of contemporary and/or traditional performing arts of a given culture such as Te Wānanga o Aotearoa’s Bachelor of Māori Performing Arts (Te Tohu Maruata) as opposed to, say, an undefined Bachelor of Performing Arts. I acknowledge that any type of performing arts is intrinsically based in culture...

<sup>6</sup> A fact which led to my recruitment and employment by Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.

<sup>7</sup> Though there are many who can capably teach traditional performing at a very high level – what is often lacking is a background in education or degrees in performing arts. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (which is the relevant accrediting body for our Bachelor’s of Māori Performing Arts) expects our teaching staff, as a rule, to hold a qualification higher than the one they are teaching in, yet in five years of hiring staff at various locations throughout the North Island, I have yet to hire a teacher of traditional Māori or Pacific Island performing arts who holds a Master’s degree, and have rarely hired any with even a Bachelor’s degree.

<sup>8</sup> A literature review is beyond the scope of this foreword. A non-comprehensive list of some significant, readily available contributions to Māori and NZ Pacific Island performing arts literature is provided in the Appendix.

increase the documentation, study, appreciation and ongoing development and vitality of the unique and diverse performing arts of Aotearoa. I also hope that there will be an increase in contributions by Māori and Pacific Islanders to Aotearoa performing arts scholarship in the future, and note that the call for submissions for this journal, in spite of its considerably flexible criteria, failed to net any contributions by PI people or about Pacific Island performing arts.

Given my above focus on contemporary industries and popular forms, it is necessary to ground the picture I have presented with a few comments (sweeping generalizations though they may be) about traditional Māori and PI performing arts. Though there have undoubtedly been many changes in traditional performing arts since the time of early contact with Europeans, with some forms, items, conventions, nuances, settings and so on, falling out of use and others being introduced, such change is a normal, inevitable part of culture, and based on my own experience I see little cause for concern about the vitality and continuity of the venerable traditions handed down from the past. The world has changed, and people have moved with it, yet a great many people continue to learn, perform and create new items in “traditional” genres and styles. These continue to be performed in more traditional ceremonial contexts as well as newer ones including competitions, various family events, and tourist shows (though in Aotearoa, the latter are mainly the province of Māori, with Rotorua the epicentre of a “tradition” of tourist performance stretching back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century).

Māori performing arts traditions are an integral part of the kaupapa Māori education that is available from preschool to tertiary levels, while they are also present in mainstream primary and secondary schools. Many primary and secondary schools in communities hosting high percentages of Pacific Islanders also have PI culture clubs. Primary and secondary school cultural performing arts competitions are common, with the gargantuan ASB Secondary Schools Festival competition providing a major annual focus of activities for Auckland Māori and PI culture groups, and the Pasifika Festival providing another example of a huge annual forum for PI performing arts, not to mention the smaller more focused festivals such as the Kia Orana Festival for Cook Islanders held in Mangere (South Auckland), or the festivals happening in other regions. Traditional Māori performing arts can be found in an array of regional competitions for schoolchildren and adults, with the latter leading to the huge national Kapa Haka festival, presently known as Te Matatini, which is held every two years. Competition is an extremely widespread context, perhaps owing to its apparent resonance with facets of traditional Māori society and culture. Beginning last year, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa even introduced its own annual competition between staff from its various campuses. Competitions are one of many significant areas that deserve greater attention in future research.

Performing arts in Aotearoa are vibrant, dynamic and diverse. The publication of the first E-journal devoted to this field, with its inherent ability to incorporate the sight, the sound, and the movement of its subject matter is an exciting development. I would like to acknowledge the support of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and Drama NZ, and express my appreciation to Susan Battye for her extensive efforts that both initiated this project and saw it through to fruition. I acknowledge and applaud the contributors who answered the call for papers and sent in submissions, and the many others who provided editing and other forms of support. It is ironic and regrettable

that the Te Wānanga o Aotearoa School of Performing Arts, which gave rise to this special journal edition, will be fully disestablished almost immediately after the launch of this journal as a result of the comprehensive restructuring of TWOA. Hopefully the financial and operational pressures that gave rise to this will diminish without threatening the continuation of projects such as this groundbreaking E-journal, or the continuity of TWOA's unique and innovative performing arts programmes.

Naku noa,

Jonathan Fohrman  
Director, School of Performing Arts  
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa

July 2006

## Appendix

### Select Readings

- Flintoff, B. (2004). *Taonga Puoro: Singing Treasures – The Musical Instruments of the Maori*. Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing.
- Gardiner, W. (2003). *Haka: A Living Tradition*. Auckland: Hodder Moa Beckett.
- Hayward, P. et al (Ed.'s) (1994). North Meets South: Popular Music in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Special issue of *Perfect Beat* 1/4.
- Huata, N. (2000). *The Rhythm and Life of Poi*. Auckland: HarperCollins.
- Kaepler, A.L. & Love, J.W. Ed.'s (1998). *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 9: Australia and the Pacific Islands*. New York: Garland.
- Karetu, T. (1993). *Haka! Te Tohu o te Whenua Rangatira / The Dance of a Noble People*. Auckland: Reed.
- Katene, T.P. (1991). The Maori World of Music. In Thomson, J.M. *The Oxford History of New Zealand Music* (pp. 1-6). Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- McLean, M. & Orbell, M. (2002). *Songs of a Kaumatua*. Auckland: Auckland University Press.
- McLean, M. (1999). *Weavers of Song: Polynesian Music and Dance*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- McLean, M. (1996). *Māori Music*. Auckland: Auckland University Press.
- Mitchell, T. (1996). *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania*. London and New York: Cassell.
- Orbell, M. 1991. *Waiata: Maori Songs in History*. Auckland: Reed.
- Shennan, J. (1984). *The Maori Action Song*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Thomas, A. (1996). *New Song and Dance from the Central Pacific: Creating and Performing the Fatele of Tokelau in the Islands and in New Zealand*. Stuyvesant (New York): Pendragon Press.