

# THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF MUSIC PERFORMANCE ON MANIHIKI

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The material culture of music performance in Polynesia has been relatively neglected as an area of study. This is somewhat puzzling, especially when one considers that Polynesian music and dance performances perhaps represent the most obvious audible/visible expressions of Polynesian culture and are the cultural forms most widely known and appreciated by non-Polynesians. Whilst the musicological and choreological aspects are now being studied more closely, the material culture associated with music and dance performances has been little studied and is deserving of more attention in contemporary anthropological research.

In studying the material culture of music performance on Manihiki, northern Cook Islands, I have attempted to take an interdisciplinary approach.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, this approach provides a framework within which the material culture may be interpreted in its cultural context; where each example may be viewed as part of a wider material system and not simply as an isolated item, disconnected from the people and their culture. In this way, I am seeking to present a balanced view of the material anthropology of the people of Manihiki, focussing upon music and dance activities.

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## Music and dance forms on Manihiki

The music of the people of Manihiki takes several forms, both religious and secular. Religious music, which may be performed either inside or outside the church building, is always performed unaccompanied, that is, without dancing and without musical instruments. It consists of purely vocal forms. The simple harmonic style of singing the European type of Protestant hymn is known as *himene apii sabati* (Sunday School hymns), whereas the more complex, polyphonic, local style of hymn singing is termed *himene tuki*.<sup>2</sup> *Himene apii sabati* use Rarotongan texts from the hymn book published by the Cook Islands Christian Church (C.I.C.C.) whereas *himene tuki* are usually sung in Manihikian. The texts of these are usually adapted directly from the Bible and are most often taken from verses in the Old Testament, the Book of Psalms being most favoured. This style of hymn is sung by all denominations at important occasions, such as a welcoming ceremony for an important visitor, or at a funeral, but are not performed within the Roman Catholic Church in Tauhunu or Seventh Day Adventist Church during regular Sunday services.

Secular music consists of drum or drum dance music, and a more Westernised form of music which is based upon stringed instruments; the guitar and the ukelele. The drum dance, called on Manihiki *hupahupa*, (see Figure 1) may be accompanied by skin drums (*pahu matatahi* and *pahu matarua*), wooden slit drums (*koriro*), metal drums (*tini*, cabin bread tins), (see Figure 2), chanting, calling and, less often, singing. The drum group (*pupu pahu*) consists of male performers only. A third form of secular music, which is an unaccompanied vocal form, is called *ute*. This is generally believed by Manihiki people to have been introduced in the early part of the 20th century from Tahiti. It would appear to be more popular and more frequently performed in the southern Cook Islands but is not such a popular form on Manihiki. The chant or *pehe* is also an unaccompanied vocal form (an example of which is given later), as is the lullaby recorded by Moyle (1985: 24). On Manihiki, the *pehe* proper would appear to be performed on formal occasions only as nowadays the *pehe* may be sung, rather than chanted. The contemporary sung type of *pehe* is referred to as *atu pehe* (a 'composed' *pehe*) and is often used as an introduction to the *kaparima* (see below), being accompanied by guitar, ukelele and skin drum. The melody, however, is usually based on voice inflexions from the older, chanted *pehe* and the rhythm, too, is based upon chanted rhythms (Ben Ellis, pers.comm. 1986).

Music performed on guitar and ukelele is nearly always



Figure 1. Tauhunu Rua group performing *hupahupa* at a wedding.

accompanied by rhythmic beating on a skin drum (usually the double-headed skin drum, *pahu matarua*, although on occasions the single-headed skin drum *pahu matatahi*, may also be used) and by singing. It may or may not be intended for dancing. If there is dancing to this type of music, the dance style is quite different from that of the *hupahupa* and is termed an 'action song' or *kaparima*.

Another form of dance is the *fotea*, which combines the elements of *hupahupa* and *kaparima* but, apart from the dancers' use of decorated boxes during *fotea* performance, the material culture associated with this dance form does not differ greatly from that associated with the dance forms already mentioned. The *fotea* would appear to be peculiar to the northern atolls of the Cook Islands but is rarely performed nowadays. One reason for this may be that it cannot be used in national competition with dancers from the southern group.<sup>3</sup>

'Social' dancing on Manihiki is based on European/American forms, such as the waltz and the square dance, and more modern popular rock forms, danced in pairs and accompanied by recorded music. However, the more modern style of dancing, where couples dance apart from one another, contains strong elements of *hupahupa* movements and could thus be described as an acculturated form, whereas earlier dance styles, like the waltz and quickstep, are danced in Western ballroom style. The recorded music used at social dances is either on disc or cassette tape. On special occasions,



a.



b.



c.



d.

**Figure 2.** Members of drum group rehearsing in Sunday School building, Tauhunu: a. *Pahu matatahi* b. *Pahu matarua* c. *Koriro* d. *Tini*.

such as weddings and Gospel Day, live music is provided for accompaniment to social dancing. These groups of musicians are referred to as 'bands' and normally consist of guitars, ukeleles, *pahu matarua* and singers. Some bands also include a mouth organ or button accordion, and occasionally metal spoons are added.

Another Western secular form of music found on Manihiki is that performed by the brass band. This small band is the Boys' Brigade Band and thus consists entirely of male members of the community. The instruments are all imported and consist of cornets, tenor horns, euphoniums, a side drum and a bass drum. The Boys' Brigade Band performs regularly each month at a C.I.C.C. service known as 'church parade' where all youth groups are expected to attend. Those groups which have uniforms, for example, the Girl Guides, are required to wear them to this service. However, the role of the Band is not to accompany religious music during the church service, but to play both before and after the service, to accompany the youth groups, who march a short distance to and from the church. The Band also performs on special occasions, such as accompanying a wedding procession to and from the church (see Figure 3).

## Material culture : Theoretical aspects

The material culture associated with music and dance performance may be divided into two distinct areas, and I have termed these divisions, 'primary' material culture and 'secondary' material culture. By 'material culture' I mean the tangible phenomena of a human society which are the purposive products of ideas and patterns of behaviour which are learned, not instinctive (Reynolds 1984: 4). By 'primary' material culture I refer, in this context, to those items of material culture which are *essential* to music performance, that is, without which a particular form of music or dance performance could not take place. An example of this would be the musical instruments in the drum group (see Figure 4) without which a drum dance performance could not take place.

'Secondary' material culture falls into two categories:

1. Material culture items closely associated with but not necessarily essential to music/dance performance, such as dance costume, the built environment, and so on, and
2. Material culture items which are directly or indirectly referred to either by words (for example, in song texts) or by actions (for example, in dance movement).

This second category of 'secondary' material culture requires further clarification and I present here two examples by way of illustration.

A distinguished visitor to Manihiki on arrival by boat at the small wharf at Tauhunu (see Figure 5) is greeted with the old form of welcome. This consists of an *aumohi* or welcome chant (*pehe*), led by a man who is the chant leader (*tangata aumohi*) but who is supported by a small number of people making up a welcoming group. This group provides a chorus for the chant.

Leader: Tau mai! Tau mai!  
Tau mai na runga i te mata i te po-ra  
Maringi te pu-re.

Chorus: Hui-a!

Leader: Maringi te pu-re.

Chorus: Hui-a!

(Whole verse repeated and followed by a short performance by a drum group.)

In this chant, the *pora* referred to is a coconut palm branch which has been split longitudinally down the main rib, the leaflets being plaited to form a type of mat. In former times the landing place would have been covered in *pora* (Nehemia Tauira, pers.comm. 1986), thus providing an area of covered ground on to which the visitor was expected to step, '*Tau mai na runga i te mata i te pora*' meaning to alight at the end of the *pora*. The visitor would then have been conducted along the *pora* pathway to the *marae* where the official welcome would be made, incorporating speeches, prayers and singing. Nowadays, however, the ground is not covered with *pora* but the *tangata aumohi* carries a *pora* in one hand, symbolising the *pora* pathway of former times. In the accompanying illustration (see Figure 6), a young schoolboy, Principal Tauira, has been chosen as *tangata aumohi* to welcome the local member of Parliament for Manihiki who was paying a visit from Rarotonga. He is wearing a costume of fern leaves (*maire*) and carrying a plaited palm branch (*pora*) in one hand. (In his other hand he carries a staff, also made from part of a coconut palm branch.) This example demonstrates a relationship between text and an item of material culture.

The second example demonstrates how dance movement may also relate to material culture. A drum dance (*hupahupa*) composed and choreographed for a Manihiki dance team in 1975 begins with a chant '*Koai teia e reo aroha tona?*' (Who is the person whom we love/respect?). The main section of the dance (*taki*) was composed by Papa Mehau Karaponga and in this section the dancers' movements



**Figure 3.** Boys Brigade Band marching in a wedding procession, Tauhunu.



**Figure 4.** Tauhunu Rua drum group.



**Figure 5.** Small wharf, facing entrance through reef (*avanui*), and *fare kako*, Tauhunu, where welcoming ceremonies are conducted for important visitors to Manihiki.

correspond to the actions used by Manihiki people when carrying out their work, for example, husking coconuts, making copra, preparing pandanus leaves and coconut palm leaves. The music and the dance thus portray the preparation of materials for the manufacture of different items of material culture.

## Music performance and the built environment

Whilst it is not feasible to present a detailed survey of all primary and secondary material culture associated with contemporary music performance on Manihiki, I have selected some examples of the built environment (in this case, place of performance) for further discussion. The built environment is defined here as the human use of materials or activities to arrange the environment into purposeful structures.

From research undertaken to date, it is evident that the type of music performance varies according to the place of performance. The built environment may also act as a catalyst for music performance. An example of this would be the restoration and opening in 1986 of the *fare ariki* (chief's house) which stimulated the



**Figure 6.** Schoolboy, Principal Tauira, is dressed in fern leaves (*maire*) for his part as *aumohi tangata*. The plaited coconut palm branch (*pora*) is carried in his left hand as he awaits the arrival of the Member of Parliament at Tauhunu wharf.

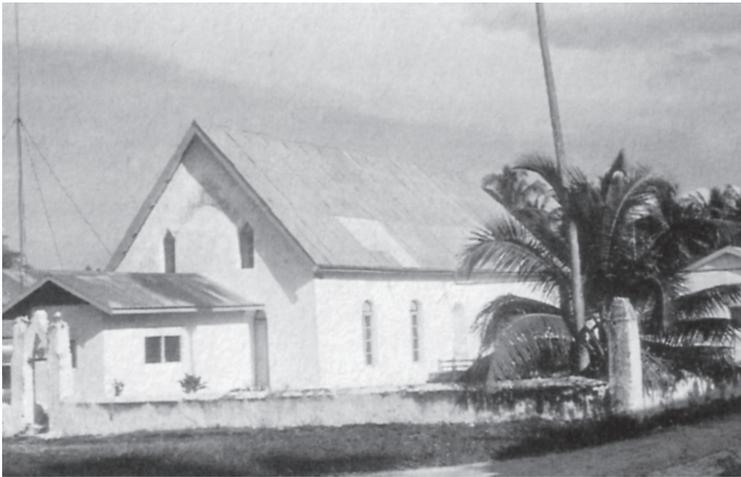


**Figure 7.** Secular *marae* in centre of Tauhunu village. Partly restored *fare ariki* on the left; administration building on the right.

composition and preparation of new musical works. So too, the place of performance may enforce limitations on the physical aspects of musical performance, for example, the size and shape of the wharf at Tauhunu (see Figure 5) limited the number of people who could be comfortably accommodated on the wharf and provided one factor in determining the number of people forming the chorus for the welcoming chant.

In Figure 7 the centre of Tauhunu village is shown. On the left is the *fare ariki* under restoration, and the building shown behind the open space is the main Government or administration building. This area is a secular *marae* or meeting place known as *marae opari*. The verandah of the administration building is an area where music and dance performances take place. Social dancing is held here at night time as this is convenient to the electricity supply, the court room being used to accommodate the stereo equipment for playing recorded music, and overhead electric lights on the verandah providing light for the dancers. *Umukai* or feasts to welcome and entertain important visitors are also held here. Guests are presented with special gifts, speeches are given, and dances, both *hupahupa* and *kaparima*, are performed.

The *fare ariki*, administration building and C.I.C.C. buildings in Tauhunu village were all constructed during the late 19th century. Two early buildings, now restored, are the Mission House and the



**Figure 8.** Area of the old sacred *marae*, ‘Pou tuteru’, which now has C.I.C.C. buildings erected on its site in Tauhunu; Church building in centre, mission house on the far right.

church building of the C.I.C.C. (see Figure 8). These buildings were constructed on the site of an old sacred *marae* called ‘Pou tuteru’ and the area is still known by that name. The corrugated iron roofs of the church and Mission House replace what were originally pandanus roofs. It is in these structures, inside the church itself and on the large back verandah of the Mission House, that *himene tuki* and *himene apii sabati* may be heard.

As mentioned earlier, *himene tuki*, may be performed outside the church at special functions and ceremonies. An example of this is the singing which takes place as part of the ceremonies associated with death. After the burial, it is customary for the bereaved family to be comforted by the enthusiastic singing of hymns, especially *himene tuki*. This part of the death ceremony is called *apare heva*, and both young and old participate, although the young people usually sing *himene apii sabati*. In Tukao village there is a structure not unlike the old eastern Polynesian form of house of entertainment (*fare karioi*). This particular building is known as ‘Tukao Veravera Hall’ (see Figure 9), and is the building where singing and social dancing take place, as well as some indoor games. As it also houses two water tanks, it is referred to colloquially as the *fare vai* (lit. ‘water house’). It is in this building that *apare heva* are conducted in Tukao village. The ceremony usually takes place at night (see Figure 10); the burial itself and the burial services having



**Figure 9.** Tukao Veravera Hall, Tukao village.

taken place during the day.

An old coral and lime building in Tukao village, known as the *fare ture*, was used for many years as a house of entertainment and as a court house. Since the building of the new Tukao Veravera Hall, the *fare ture* is no longer used for music and dance performances and has been re-roofed in corrugated iron (see Figure 11) in an attempt to preserve the building until such time as proper restoration can be carried out.

## Conclusion

From these few examples, it is possible to gain some idea of the different musical styles, both sacred and secular, and the types of places where performances may be held. Performances take place in the open (such as at the wharf at Tauhunu village), in semi-open constructions (such as a large verandah or the Tukao Veravera Hall), or inside a closed building (such as a church).

It could be argued that the type of *music* performance is directly related to the type of *place* at which the performance is held. This is not to say that the built environment is the *only* determining factor in the type of music or dance selected for performance. Music performance and place of performance (as well as other associated



**Figure 10.** Performing *himene tuki* at *apare heva* to comfort the bereaved family, Tukao Veravera Hall.

items of material culture) must be perceived as being selected from within the cultural constraints of Manihiki society and must be accepted as being fitting and proper to the social occasion. The social behaviour appropriate to the occasion ultimately determines the type of musical performance and places it in an appropriate setting.

The built environment may, however, influence music performance by providing cues for certain types of culturally acceptable behaviour: ‘... when physical cues identify a setting, people are reminded of the context, the situation and hence the expected, and culturally appropriate behaviour’ (Rapoport 1980: 299). An example of this has been provided where the C.I.C.C. building served as a cue to remind the Boys’ Brigade Band not to enter the church where the culturally appropriate musical behaviour was the performance of unaccompanied sacred songs. Socially acceptable behaviour, within the Manihiki cultural system, determines the selection of music and the environmental setting, but the built environment itself acts as a cue to remind the musicians of the appropriate behaviour. From the examples studied, it is possible to say that there is indeed a correlation between musical styles and the built environment.

Although this paper has touched only superficially on one aspect of the material culture of Manihiki, that is, the built environment associated with music and dance performance, I have sought to



**Figure 11.** Old courthouse, *fare ture*, formerly used for music/dance performances, Tukao village.

demonstrate the rich and varied types of musical styles which may be heard on Manihiki today and to show some of the settings in which music is performed. Further research is needed on the manufacture and usage of musical instruments and dance costume, the history and construction of the built environment, the influence of electrical equipment on contemporary music and dance performance, and other material items associated with these aspects of Manihiki culture. In this way, I shall eventually be able to analyse a comprehensive material system surrounding music performance in this area of Polynesia, and to place this analysis in an historical and cultural perspective. It is to be hoped that this study will therefore be of benefit to the people of Manihiki as well as to other scholars and researchers.

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## Notes

1. This paper is a revised version of a paper presented at the symposium 'History and Culture of the Pacific', Helsinki, January 1987. The original presentation contained much visual and aural material which cannot be reproduced here. As explained at the symposium, further fieldwork has yet to be carried out and this paper should therefore be regarded as a presentation of work in progress. The correlation between the built environment and music performance is advanced as a working hypothesis.
2. For a more detailed discussion of this form, including its composition and performance, see Moyle 1985: 5–13, 22–23, 30–31.
3. The main categories for national competition, such as that held annually at the Constitution Day celebrations in Rarotonga, are *nuku henua* (dramatic presentation of a myth or legend, termed *peu tupuna* in Rarotonga), *kaparima*, *hupahupa* (termed '*urn pa'u*' in Rarotonga), *himene tuki*, and *ute*.

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