Singing Faith:
A History of the Waiata Maori Choir, 1924-1938.

Michelle Willyams

Presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in History at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

30 March 2012.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of illustrations and figures</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of abbreviations</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER ONE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER TWO</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing for Salvation in the Methodist Church</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Tradition of Live Performance in the 1920s and 1930s</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FOUR</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing Maori History and Culture on the Australian Stage</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FIVE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing Maori Culture for the Empire</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix One: Waiata Maori Choir Membership, 1924-1938</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Two: Glossary of Maori-English</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Three: Timeline</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

The question of why a European-descended New Zealand woman might want to carry out research on a Methodist Maori choir has often crossed people’s lips when asking about my thesis topic. The reason for my interest in the topic is that the Waiata Maori Choir intersects a number of my hobbies and education. Kapahaka, or Maori performance and dance were a major part of my secondary education and I enjoyed learning more about this aspect of the WMC. I was involved in several choirs during my secondary and tertiary education, including the New Zealand Secondary Students’ Choir from 2005-06 and classical singing has become a professional hobby. My knowledge of music and performance meant that I felt comfortable researching this choir. Combined with all of these overlapping interests I have a passion for history and for uncovering untold stories. The Waiata Maori Choir offered a chance to develop and explore these interests.

This thesis aims to provide a succinct, accessible and enjoyable reading experience not only for those participants and family of the choir members, but also for future researchers in the field of music history. I dedicate this research to the Methodist Church and also to the families of the Waiata Maori Choir members.

This project was carefully crafted and guided by my supervisors. My thanks go to Professor Barbara Brookes, without whom this topic may still be awaiting investigation, and whose expertise and ideas made the research all the more enjoyable and informative. My sincere thanks also go to Dr Mark Seymour, who helped me to shape my writing and consider structural aspects of the thesis. I make special mention to the support of Professor Tom Brooking, who kindly passed on to me valuable records that had been in his safe keeping until such a time that someone undertook this specific research. My sincere thanks also go to the Ellison family, of Otakau, who have kindly allowed me to use these family records.

My research could not have been conducted without the assistance of the staff at the various institutions visited. I cannot acknowledge every person by name but I would like to thank the staff at the Hocken Library; the Dunedin Public Library Heritage Collection; the Alexander Turnbull Library and the National Archives; and the Methodist Church Archives, in both Auckland and Christchurch. In particular, I am grateful to Jo Smith at the Christchurch Methodist Church Archives. She went
above and beyond her responsibilities and I wish to acknowledge her kindness and thoughtfulness in providing me with assistance, even after the Christchurch Archive was closed due to the 22 February 2011 earthquake. I also wish to acknowledge the financial support provided by the Wesley Historical Society, which awarded me the Gilmore Smith Scholarship to assist in my research.

Many thanks to the administrative and academic staff at History Department at the Otago University, who provided appreciated financial support in the form of the Masters Scholarship. This year would not have been conceivable without the support and friendship from my colleagues at the Student Learning Centre, namely Carole Scott, Lee Adams, Angela McLean, Pauline Brooks and Nell Smith, who not only listened to numerous ideas and problems, but who also provided useful tips and positive encouragement.

Much of my research was carried out away from my home base in Dunedin, including Christchurch, Wellington, and Auckland. My thanks must go to those friends who provided me with a home-away-from-home during those trips. In particular I would like to thank Anna Lau in Christchurch; Georgina Furniss in Wellington; and Briar, Emily and Helen, and their respective families for providing me with a bed while I researched in Auckland.

To the History Postgraduates of 2011, I am extremely happy to have worked with you this year. While I cannot mention you all, special thanks to Angela Findlay, Fabia Fox, Jane Adam, and Jane McCabe for sharing your stories, removing the isolation, and for bringing reality to the whole process.

I would like to thank my family for all their encouraging words and support throughout my time at university. Finally, this year would not have been possible without the love and unceasing support of Tim Walker. Tim was instrumental in designing the beautiful maps for this thesis, but more than that, gave me fun and laughter at the end of every day.
Illustrations, Figures and Photographs

Figures:
1. Graph of religious attendance in New Zealand in 1920s 53

Illustrations and pictures:
1. Sheet Music for *Ka Mate* 63
2. Sheet Music for *Waiata Poi* 64
3. Sheet Music for *Hine e Hine* (Maori Slumber Song) 68
4. Sheet Music for *New Zealand Marsellaise* 71
5. Advertisement for the Waiata Maori Choir in Victoria 87
7. Advertisement for the WMC in Porthleven, England 134
8. WMC Farewell Concert Pamphlet, London 141

Maps:
1. Map of North and South Island Touring Itinerary 43
2. Map of Australian Tours, 1935 and 1937 86
3. Map of World Tour Destinations 116
4. Map of Great Britain Tour Itinerary 126

Photographs:
1. Methodist Home Mission Party, 1928 19
2. Reverend Arthur J Seamer in 1933 30
3. Advertisement for the Methodist Home Mission Party, 1924 40
4. The 1935 Members of the Waiata Maori Choir during their tour of Australia

5. Methodist Home Mission Party, 1924

6. Maori Male Voice Choir with Taka Ropata, 1934

7. Seamer’s car being loaded onto the boat at Auckland

8. Official 1935 WMC Australia Tour photograph

9. Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne, Australia

10. WMC with Mayor Vice-Regal Sir Leslie Wilson

11. WMC with the Mayor of Hobart

12. The male members of the Waiata Maori Choir outside an “Eastern Palace” in Colombo, Ceylon

13. Methodist Church Hall, Westminster, England

14. WMC pose at the New Street Station in Birmingham

15. “Colour Line Drawn in Cornish Hotel Again,” *Western Independence*

16. Civic Reception with Mayor Wilton in Londonderry

17. WMC with the Lord and Lady Craigavon

18. Alexander Palace, BBC Station in London, 1937

## ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATL</td>
<td>Alexander Turnbull Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Church Missionary Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPL</td>
<td>Dunedin Public Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAC</td>
<td>Minutes of Annual Conference of Methodist Church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCNZA</td>
<td>Methodist Church of New Zealand Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHMP</td>
<td>Methodist Home Mission Party, so named until 1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLCS</td>
<td>Methodist Literature and Colporteur Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS, MSS</td>
<td>Manuscript, manuscripts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZMT</td>
<td>New Zealand Methodist Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODT</td>
<td>Otago Daily Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sic</td>
<td>as cited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEP</td>
<td>The Evening Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPM</td>
<td>Te Pou o Mangatawhiri, Te Puea Herangi’s Concert Party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMC</td>
<td>Waiata Maori Choir</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

One of the first cultural encounters between New Zealand Maori and European explorers was a musical one.¹ When the Dutch explorer, Abel Tasman arrived on the New Zealand coast in 1642, it was a musical interchange that determined the relationship between the local Maori tribe and the Dutch sailors. The investigating tribe blew their Pukaea (war trumpets) to test the newcomers, who responded in kind, by playing tunes on their brass trumpets.² The Dutch possibly considered the Maori music to be a sign of civilisation and peace, yet the Maori may have believed the Dutch reply a call to arms because the ensuing interaction resulted in four Dutch deaths at the hands of the tribe.³ This event was arguably the first instance of musical “mishearing” between Europeans and Maori. Both the Dutch and the Maori tribe misunderstood the cultural meaning attached to the sounds that came from the others’ instrument. While New Zealand’s earliest musical encounter ended in bloodshed, this event marks just the beginning in a long narrative of cultural interaction between Pakeha (European New Zealanders) and Maori.

This thesis traces the development of a small section of New Zealand’s music culture. Parallel to the growth of separate European and Maori musical traditions was a vibrant music culture that consisted of combinations of both traditions. A major venue for the display of such hybridised music was the stage. This thesis makes use of a phrase typically used in museum studies to outline a core idea, where the stage is “a space where different cultures and communities intersect,

³ Lodge, “Music Historiography in New Zealand,” 627. Anne Salmond notes that the Dutch crew were not entirely unaware of the hostile intent of the Maori tribe, who prepared their guns and muskets in precaution: Anne Salmond, Two Worlds: First Meetings between Maori and Europeans, 1642-1772 (Auckland: Viking, 1991), 22.
interact and are mutually influenced by the encounter. By acknowledging that this phrase has connotations aligned with objectification of culture, I hope to recast it within the scope of music history. The stage is a site that is constantly modified in response to changing contexts, such as private versus public demonstrations, commercial or non-profit agendas, or in religious or secular environments. This contribution to New Zealand music history will cast light on an example during the 1920s and 1930s when Maori and European musical traditions merged on a variety of stages and in numerous contexts, which enabled diversity, education, and development not only for the performers involved but for their audiences throughout New Zealand, Australia and Great Britain.

The Methodist Home Mission Party (MHMP, later renamed the Waiata Maori Choir) provides a case study to explore the hybrid nature of New Zealand’s music history. Established in 1924 by Reverend Arthur John Seamer, the choir group consisted of Maori performers who presented an eclectic range of repertoire, including religious, indigenous, popular or mainstream music, as well as imported music and Western art music. The group performed on many stages for nearly twelve months of each year from 1924 to 1938, constituting no small feat of performance stamina. Investigating the MHMP contributes to our understanding about music as a social tool for interacting and educating audiences and performers alike.

**Music History in New Zealand**

In order to place Maori music in context, it is important to understand more about its origins. Maori are believed to have settled in New Zealand from somewhere in Eastern Polynesia about 1000AD. Their immediate place of origin is not agreed upon by historians, with the Society Islands, the Marquesas Islands and the Cook Islands all candidates for the legendary Hawaiki (the homeland of the Maori). These immigrants brought with them a strong Polynesian musical influence, which was then

---

transmitted throughout the geographically isolated environment as different groups spread out across the landmass of New Zealand.

Maori had a long tradition of musical practices prior to European colonisation. Mervyn McLean, in his extensive doctoral research on Maori music, identified three forms of indigenous Maori music. The first is wholly indigenous in origin and typically known as Maori chant. It is classified by song use, which can be further grouped on musical grounds into two categories: recited and sung. Karakia, Patere and Haka are the three main recited styles of chant. The sung styles of Maori chant include Waiata, Pao, Poi, and Oriori. The second form of Maori music, known as action song, dates only from the beginning of the twentieth century and its origins are subject to dispute, although generally attributed to the Maori leader Sir Apirana Ngata (1874-1950). Although the words and movements in action songs are Maori, the melodies are English, which suggests that European contact after the nineteenth century helped develop this style of Maori music.

A third style of Maori music was indigenous instrumentation. Instruments were limited to idiophones and aerophones. Idiophones are instruments the whole of which vibrates to produce a sound when struck, shaken or scraped. Maori idiophones consisted of the Pahu, the Pakuru and the Roria, which typically served to alert villages of danger or to signal certain occasions. The Pahu was usually suspended above the platform of the watchtower in fortified Maori villages, and it was the watchman’s duty to strike the gong occasionally to show that they were on the alert. The Pahu was also used in wartime as a signal of hostilities. Maori aerophones, or wind instruments, included four trumpets, the Putatara or Pu moana, the Pukaea, the Tetere and the Putorino, and two flutes, the Koauau and the Nguru. Other instruments the Kororohu (whizzer) and the Purohurohu (bullroarer). The variety of instruments and vocal music suggests the important role that music played within Maori society.

11 Ibid., 166-199.
Performance traditions were highly valued in pre-contact Maori society due to the lack of a written language. Rachael Te Awhina Ka’ai-Mahuta, in her doctoral thesis, outlined the importance of narrating Maori history through song. In an interview, a participant discussed how the lack of a written medium meant that one had to find ways of retaining the knowledge passed on to you. They said, “Through Maori oral tradition, knowledge is transmitted and committed to memory for the next generation, whereby the cycle begins again. One of the key tools of this process is composition, or waiata and haka.” Rachael Te Awhina Ka’ai-Mahuta, “A Critical Analysis of Waiata and Haka as Commentaries and Archives of Maori Political History” (PhD diss., Auckland University of Technology, 2010), 124.

Ethnographer Elsdon Best observed in 1925, “The marked peculiarity of the social life of the Maori folk was the frequent and universal reliance placed on song as a medium of communication.” By considering that these musical idioms were historically and politically significant for cultural maintenance one can begin to understand the importance of music for Maori culture. If we are to accept Alan Merriam’s seminal idea that “music is culture,” we may come closer to understanding the place that music held within Maori culture.

General histories regarding music in New Zealand have tended to focus on separate music traditions of Maori and Pakeha. McLean posits that the traditional Maori music system was incompatible with the European system, thus making a strong case for why a separate music history may have developed. The narrative of musical interaction between Maori and Pakeha can be traced more readily in the writings and memoirs of those early European explorers and settlers in the early nineteenth century. We know of Tasman’s response to the Maori pukaea through his journal entry, which is emblematic of the initial misunderstanding between the European and Maori people. While Tasman fled the country after the incident, a

12 Rachael Te Awhina Ka’ai-Mahuta, “A Critical Analysis of Waiata and Haka as Commentaries and Archives of Maori Political History” (PhD diss., Auckland University of Technology, 2010), 124.
15 McLean, Maori Music, 274.
century later Captain James Cook observed Maori musical practices. In 1770 he wrote:

They [Maori] have other songs which are sung by the women, whose voices are remarkably mellow and soft, and have a pleasing and tender effect; the time is slow and the cadence mournful, but it is conducted with more taste than could be expected among the poor ignorant savages of this half-desolate country; especially as it seemed to us, who were none of us much acquainted with music as a science, to be sung in parts.16

Other early travellers commented on the vocal music of Maori in the early nineteenth century. The French explorer Paul Mérault Monneron, a contemporary of Cook, visited New Zealand in 1769 aboard the ship *St Jean Baptiste*. Monneron remarked in his journal: “These natives evidently have a taste for music. We heard them singing in chorus and they kept in perfect tune.”17 Similarly, the writings of Dr. Forster, who came with Captain Cook on the second voyage to the Pacific in 1774, revealed his enjoyment and belief in Maori musical talent: “We frequently heard him [Peeterre] and the rest of the natives on shore, and were sometimes favoured with a song when they visited us on board. Their music is far superior in variety to that of the Society and Friendly Islands.”18 The comments of these explorers suggest that early musical interactions between the two cultures were limited to separate performances for the viewing of the other.

While European records illustrate what early explorers experienced when encountering Maori music, it is difficult to know what Maori thought of European music (let alone Europeans themselves). There are almost no extant Maori records of musical interactions with Pakeha, which makes it complicated to provide a balanced picture of early responses to musical encounters. The absence of Maori voices is in part because few Maori were literate or left written narratives in the early stages of colonisation.

Musical interchange between Maori and Pakeha in New Zealand grew with the establishment of permanent European communities in the mid-nineteenth century. The musical equilibrium shifted as more settlers began to arrive. Historian Kirstine Moffat describes the story of European colonisation in New Zealand as “one of cultural diffusion from the imperial centre,” which involved “the transference of cultural baggage and habits of thought.” Along with the arrival of people, ideas, tools, weapons, flora, fauna, and diseases, came performance traditions and musical habits that inevitably accompanied immigrants. Traders, sealers, whalers and missionaries laid the groundwork for the development of a distinctive New Zealand folk song ethos, “with English, Scottish and Irish folksong material and a resultant acculturation of such material in the new environment.”

As well as a folk song tradition, other forms of Western music were introduced to New Zealand. Missionaries brought with them church music, while other early colonists introduced Western art music, particularly opera airs and ballads, music theatre, and vaudeville. Adrienne Simpson notes that, “As settlers strove to recreate for themselves an approximation of the cultural life they had left behind, music quickly became the most valued and practiced of the performing arts, and… established itself as a favourite pursuit at all levels of society.” The piano in particular became a cultural symbol of colonial New Zealand. McLean points out that some of the musical activities of the settlers were unlikely to have affected Maori in the early stages of colonisation (and even later in the century). “Events such as balls, soirees, theatrical performances, opera and oratorio, instrumental recitals and orchestral and chamber music concerts” writes McLean, “were largely urban and, in

---

22 Ibid.
colonial times, were probably exclusively European.”24 New Zealand’s early written history then is typically characterised by a dominant Pakeha music culture that tended to override Maori music traditions.

Music History Abroad

Debates are fierce about the place and direction of Western music history in musicology and ethnomusicology. Some academics feel that the notion of music history is problematic. Music historian Ardis Butterfield argues that since the cultural shift in the twentieth century, which is recognisable across many humanities disciplines, there is concern about what music history is.25 In Reinhard Strohm’s introduction to volume three of the *New Oxford History of Music*, Strohm comments that there is a literary tradition of “writing about music although not of music,”26 and he admits that music history turns out to be about everything but music: music is “a cultural practice,” “discursive,” “performative,” “visual,” “verbal,” and “archival,” but not musical.27 Butterfield admits that the only way to make music part of history is to write history instead, but that one should be wary of the risks involved in not subsuming music within general historical practice.28

Alongside the concerns regarding how to define the parameters of music history, there have been those who have problematised the nature of music history itself. Derek Scott notes that since the nineteenth century, music history had been interpreted “according to distinctively romantic and modernist tenets, with the emphasis being on formal and technical values, on novelty and compositional ‘coups,’ on the composition in itself and its place in an autonomous musical process, and on internationalism.”29 This method of interpreting music history has affected the way we

---

28 Ibid., 21.
understand the music of earlier periods. Scott argues that it becomes all too easy when constructing the history of a cultural tradition to assume one is dealing with facts and not interpretation, which can be seen in numerous accounts of non-Western regions.

In speaking of the development of historical musicology in the twentieth century, Scott argues that it has been predisposed toward the dominant Western musical culture. Scott admits that this pattern “tends to subordinate non-Western music cultures, and those that do not follow typical notational standards of Western music, such as jazz music, blues, folk and indigenous traditions.”

This idea applies in New Zealand. Settlers viewed Maori music through their European lens and hence were often dismissive of forms they did not understand.

Increasingly, ethnomusicologists and musicologists have sought to challenge the Eurocentric attitudes that have pervaded the disciplines in the twentieth century. Richard Middleton argues that Eurocentricism within musical narratives “arises from the attachment… of value on types of production, musical form, and listening, which authors associate with a different kind of music.” With this bias in mind, it is not difficult to parallel such developments with the apparent neglect of indigenous and Western musical interaction and those fruitful products of such relationships. Arguably, such partiality does not enable investigation of many musical traditions that are the outcome of both Western and indigenous musical characteristics on the basis of its musical strength.

From the 1980s onward, ethnomusicologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and musicologists throughout the Western world featured mounting criticism of traditional methodology and subject matter and argued that Western art music was in crisis. In “The Exhaustion of Western Art Music” (1982), Michael Kowalski highlighted the pervading attitudes in Western (namely American) discourse on music that Western music industry was facing a crisis and argued that for musicians and composers to have success they needed to listen to the expectations and demands of their audiences. Additionally Eric Gans in “Art and Entertainment” (1985) took a structural-anthropological stance, and was concerned with the complicity rather than the contrast between art and entertainment. He argued that by the 1980s, “The

---

dominance of high culture (namely Western art music culture) was overturned by popular (music culture)." Such musicological debates opened the way for discussions about mainstream musical genres, particularly those that had been deemed “low” subjects.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, some music historians and musicologists rejected the Western Art tradition and began focusing on musical genres that had previously been ignored. A new generation of music historians, musicologists and ethnomusicologists, including Richard Leppert, Susan McClary, Richard Middleton, and Derek Scott have begun to reject the idea that styles that do not use a written score are “low” subjects, and have adopted revisionist approaches to music of different cultures.

Another area of research that has come to the forefront is the history of sound and hearing. There have been calls for some time to consider these topics as vital to the understanding of the past. As early as 1953, French historian Lucien Febvre called for a history of the sensibilities and called for attention to sound and hearing in order to avoid anachronistic readings of the past. This is an idea that has been developed by international historians today, including Alain Corbin and Sophia Rosenfeld.

Rosenfeld notes that auditory history entered historical disciplines at the intersection of the history of music, the body, technology, medicine, disability, the environment, everyday life, and in the field of soundscapes. Rosenfeld argues that a shared conceptual platform for this study exists: namely that manifest in every culture is the production of different sounds, natural and manufactured, musical and otherwise.

34 Middleton, Studying Popular Music, 105.
These sounds, considered together, form what is variously referred to as an “auditory landscape,” “soundscape,” or “sonic environment” specific to that culture.\(^{38}\)

**Historiography of Music History in New Zealand**

A proliferation of histories of Western art music societies signals the dominance of European music in twentieth century New Zealand. There has been a great deal of research on individual choral societies and orchestral societies, presumably as a consequence of private funding for histories by members of the societies to which they belong. At various times there have been histories published on regional musical societies. In Dunedin Margaret Campbell wrote *Music in Dunedin* (1945); in Christchurch Brian Pritchard wrote *Words and Music: A Jubilee History of the Christchurch Harmonic Society* (1977) and Peter Barton published *A Choral Symphony: A Short History of the Royal Christchurch Musical Society* (1985); and in Auckland, Lorna Dulieu wrote and published *Fifty years of Music Making, 1935-1985* (1985).\(^{39}\) The majority of these histories were produced in the 1970s and 1980s, and subsequent to these publications there has been a lull in popularity or demand for such work. Furthermore, while these histories are important for individual societies, there remains much to be done regarding broader historical patterns and those instances of musical interaction between Maori and Pakeha.

While Western art music societies have tended to focus mainly on individual rather than their national context, in contrast historians and ethnomusicologists such as Margaret Orbell, Mervyn McLean, and Anne Salmond have been working to deal with the problems created by the separation of Maori and Pakeha traditions.\(^{40}\) Salmond acknowledges in her book *Two Worlds* (1991) that “Maori society has falsely been represented both as functioning in equilibrium until European contact and

---


shattered beyond redemption after contact took place.\footnote{Salmond, \textit{Two Worlds: First Meetings between Maori and Europeans}, 1642-1772 (Auckland: Viking, 1991), quoted in Mervyn McLean, \textit{Maori Music} (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996), 1.} Other criticisms of the standard accounts are that too little attention has been paid to regional diversity, chronological control has been lacking, and segmentation of the study of Maori society into discrete topics such as economics, religion, art, music, warfare, and marriage “cuts across the tribal ways of understanding the past.”\footnote{Salmond, \textit{Two Worlds}, 317-19.} McLean has provided one of the most important anthropological and ethnomusicological books, entitled \textit{Maori Music} (1996), in which he “treats music as integral with, rather than isolated from, Maori society.”\footnote{McLean, \textit{Maori Music}, 1.} The book is well researched and detailed, yet its focus is on Maori music only. Instances of hybridisation and mutual musical encounters are not introduced within a framework that discusses the wider music history.

While the work of both Western and Maori music historians and ethnomusicologists has been important, my intention is to discuss the varieties of music that occurred between the two cultures on the stage. It is notable that the first attempt (and so far the only attempt) at a general history of New Zealand music could not find a way to challenge the apparent division in New Zealand’s music history. John Mansfield Thomson compiled the \textit{Oxford History of New Zealand Music} in 1991, with instructions to carry out the first overarching history of music in New Zealand. While Thomson’s book raises the prominence of music in New Zealand, the author himself admits that it has limitations. The history was severely edited of much of its content for publication purposes, with Thomson remarking, “It should be renamed the ‘Concise History of New Zealand Music,’” and “Such a small history cannot do justice to the history of music in New Zealand.”\footnote{John Mansfield Thomson, \textit{Oxford History of New Zealand Music} (Oxford University Press, 1991), ix.}

Nearly twenty years later, in 2010, Chris Bourke published a history of popular music in New Zealand, \textit{Blue Smoke} (2010). In this history, Bourke addresses the musical interactions between Maori and Pakeha and examines how New Zealand music culture evolved after World War One and created a shared jazz and popular music scene in the early 1920s. While Bourke’s history makes inroads towards
finding the stories of cross-cultural popular culture experiences, there remains much to be done in the realms of choral, religious and other minority musical genres. In order to provide a more complete history of New Zealand music, there is room for a “prequel” to Bourke’s contribution, which would contribute to our understanding about how the two cultures interacted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

New Zealand’s music history is somewhat behind the progress of other historical fields such as race relations. Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney point out that in the mid-1980s history “turned away from the domain of high politics and policy-making to focus on the ways in which race, gender and class shaped social formations,” and emerged as the dominant form of academic history writing.45 The question of race and the nature of the relationship between New Zealand’s indigenous populations and colonial settlers had been a key theme for historians since A. S. Thomson produced The Story of New Zealand in 1859. “In the 1970s,” writes Ballantyne and Moloughney, “the discussion of race relations had taken on a positivist outlook and the liberal histories of W. H. Oliver and Keith Sinclair were ultimately optimistic.”46 Work carried out by Maori historians, including Ranginui Walker and Aroha Harris further diversified the body of voices on race relations in New Zealand.47 By the 1990s, a new body of work including James Belich’s revisions of New Zealand’s colonisation process emphasised “Pakeha racism, the centrality of violence in the process of colonisation and the Crown contraventions of the Treaty of Waitangi.”48 Currently, race relations and social history reside somewhere in the middle, with the work of Lachie Paterson, Richard Hill, Angela Wanhalla, and the late Judith Binney forging the way toward a more balanced understanding of New Zealand’s racial past.49

45 Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney, eds., Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand’s Pasts (Otago University Press, 2006), 9.
49 See Lachie Paterson, “Print Culture and the Collective Maori Consciousness,” New Zealand Journal of Literature, No. 28, Part 2: Special Issue: Cultures of Print in
Sources

This thesis relies on archival material held by the Methodist Church archives in Christchurch (Latimer Square) and Auckland (Great South Road). Both archives provided a plethora of evidence regarding the Waiata Maori Choir, Reverend Arthur John Seamer, the Methodist Church and the Home and Maori Mission Departments. This evidence included photographic, written, ephemeral, administrative and aural sources. I acknowledge that many of the photographs included in this thesis are grainy which is due to my inability to gain access to the original images held in the Christchurch Methodist Archives. A complete collection of the New Zealand Methodist Times (NZMT) held at the Heritage Collections in the Dunedin Public Library, provided much evidence and discussion of the Waiata Maori Choir and Reverend Seamer. This paper was scrutinised from 1920 to 1939 to follow the progress of the choir.

As well as the NZMT, newspapers have proved a major resource for this research. Databases of digitised newspapers including Papers Past have provided many useful excerpts, which offered access to range of New Zealand newspapers, such as the Evening Post and the Otago Daily Times. I supplemented the digitised documentation in New Zealand with manual searches of newspapers including the Otago Witness, the Christchurch Press, the Otago Daily Times, and many others through the extensive range of newspapers on microfilm at both the Hocken Library and the Heritage Collection at the Dunedin Public Library. Another database was


50 The 22 February 2011 Christchurch Earthquake damaged the Latimer Square Archives and closed the premises indefinitely. The location of the Archives in the “Red Zone” (or the high risk area in the Central Business District) has also meant that access to the Archives has been prohibited. My thanks go to Jo Smith, the Head Archivist, who still managed to retain some archival evidence for the purpose of this thesis.

51 I am grateful to Methodist historian, Donald Phillips, of Dunedin who brought this information to my attention.
Trove, from the National Library of Australia, which has an extensive range of Australian sources (over two hundred million items), including a large number of newspapers from most of the states. In the United Kingdom, I investigated The Musical Times, and the database The Times Online, which chronicles the London Times paper. I acknowledge the limitations of having only two publications in representing the responses to the Waiata Maori Choir during their tour in 1937-1938. There are some newspaper clippings from a range of newspapers in the United Kingdom, such as the Coleraine Chronicle and The Londonderry Sentinel, which were included in the Christchurch Methodist archival material.52

Newspapers are contentious sources. This is due to the typically sensationalist angles taken, with stories slanted towards encouraging greater sales. Generally a newspaper is governed by the tastes of the General Editor that may change the way topics are received and reported. One example regarding the Waiata Maori Choir in 1937 was an instance of racial discrimination – the editor of the Western Independent sensationalised the story and incriminated the Cornish hotel that forced the members to find other accommodation. This article may have had a different slant had another editor been in charge, and it is difficult to know if the public held this sentiment.53

Another reason to be wary of newspapers is the challenge in assessing public access and the impact that such publications had on public opinion. Furthermore, the WMC used newspapers to advertise their upcoming concerts, and it is possible that a positive slant was published in order to attract more audiences, while not representing the real responses to the choir. All of these elements have been treated with as much care possible throughout the thesis, and at the very least are acknowledged by the author as potential issues in interpretation of the choir’s reception.

While I have often relied on written testimony and documents to trace the WMC through their tours around New Zealand and abroad, I have also been fortunate to have oral testimonies of some members of the choir. The selection of those voices has been very restricted, due to the fact that many of the members are now deceased. There were interviews and documentation of some of the choir members in the late

52 The author acknowledges the lack of citations provided on these newspapers clippings, which were part Taka Ropata and Joe Moss’ collection from their time in the Waiata Maori Choir.
53 See Chapter 5.
1980s and early 1990s, with Bill Dacker, Tapu Misa, and the late Michael King carrying out research with several choir members, including Mori Pickering (nee Ellison), Hinerangi Hikuroa, and George Ellison. While I acknowledge that I have limited oral testimony, the voices I have been able to obtain were members for substantial periods and could, to some extent, be considered representative.

Secondary sources such as hymnbooks, local histories, and publications all aided the completion of this work. The scope of the secondary research inevitably included a number of topics that this thesis could not cover, with research regarding soundscapes, sensory and aural history, ethnomusicology, transnational music history, Maori mythology and music, imperial and colonial historiography, Australian and British histories, and choral history. These topics have however, inflected the writing of this thesis and have provided fuel for further research.

**Definitions and Parameters**

The term “stage” is used to refer to any formal or informal environment, theatre, or platform that serves the purpose to display an object or person. While a stage might take different physical forms throughout countries, communities and cultures, including town halls, Methodist Sunday school halls, pulpits or even outdoor venues, what remains constant is the display and staging of people and culture for the viewing of another culture or group. Notably, the term “stage” can also imply a period, phase, juncture or division. “Stage” then, is a useful metaphor for the in-between place that performers and audiences are situated throughout the length of a single song or act, the duration of a concert, or the lingering thoughts that are inevitably transferred with listeners into their homes. While performers are on the stage, they await the approval of their audience, and similarly, performers will judge a community based on the reception to their display. The “stage” then, becomes a site

---

54 I wish to acknowledge Mori Pickering’s family and extended whanau in agreeing for me to work with the documents produced by the late Michael King, which was carried out in 1992 on Mori’s history and time in the Waiata Maori Choir. Those documents were then entrusted with Professor Tom Brooking, Otago University, until such a time as a postgraduate student, like myself, came along to carry out this research. I would also like to thank Professor Brooking for providing me with these documents. George Ellison was interviewed by Bill Dacker in the 1980s, which is now held in the Heritage Collections at the Dunedin Public Library.

of influence, where both the performer and the audience are mutually influenced by the encounter, whether the experience is negative, neutral, or positive.

“Performance” has a number of meanings, not least of which being: to carry out an action; to act, sing, or present a play before an audience; and to fulfil (a request). In all definitions there is the common understanding that “performance” implies the giving and receiving of information. The stage transforms a performance and becomes a site where cultures interact.

Stage traditions in this thesis are taken to mean only those aspects regarding New Zealand musical traditions. Performance encapsulates not only musical aspects, but also dancing and acting and even recitation traditions. For the purposes of this thesis I will discuss only musical aspects of the New Zealand stage. Acting performance tradition has a long history in New Zealand and indeed has been well explored by those experts in the discipline. Historians have also cast some light on aspects of the dancing traditions and history in New Zealand.

Chapter Outline

The main research question driving this thesis is what does the Waiata Maori Choir reveal about music history in New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s? The stage is a useful tool to cast light on what the Waiata Maori Choir reveals about hybridised musical traditions. The thesis is arranged into five chapters to correspond with the chronology of the WMC and within those chapters, I will explore four aspects of the music traditions in New Zealand revealed by the choir. These themes are the influence

---

56 Gilmour, Collins Compact Dictionary and Thesaurus, 560.
that Methodist religious performance, live music traditions, performance of Maori history and culture in Australia, and the choir’s performances in the British Empire.

Chapter Two traces the progression of musical interactions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It details the unique characteristics that enabled the establishment of the Methodist Home Mission Party (MHMP) in 1924. Beginning with the eighteenth-century musical ideals of John Wesley, I trace the alignment of these international Methodist ideas nationally and regionally in New Zealand. Music was a major cultural meeting point for Maori and Methodist missionaries, which enabled greater interaction between the two people. A brief biography of the choir’s director, Reverend Arthur John Seamer, puts into perspective the MHMP’s establishment in 1924 and will explore its genesis and growth until 1928.

The MHMP (or WMC after 1934) illuminates aspects of the live performance culture of New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s in Chapter Three. While tracing their tours throughout New Zealand between 1929 until 1934, I argue that the music traditions were vibrant and diverse. While imported influences from Britain and America were a hallmark of New Zealand’s music culture, there was a unique New Zealand pattern of cross-cultural and hybrid performances. Performance groups competing for religious, economic and political purposes were part of a wider pattern of travelling performance groups throughout New Zealand. Another contemporary entertainment was popular (or secular) music of the day, including jazz and blues music. Technological advancements were also a catalyst for change in this period. Live entertainment began moving into new social territory by the 1930s.

Performing Maori history and culture on the Australian stage is the subject of Chapter Four. The tours to Australia in 1935 and 1937 by the newly renamed Waiata Maori Choir (WMC) marked a leap in the success of the group. I explore the chronology of the Australian tours while suggesting how the different national site changed the reception of the choir’s performances. This thesis investigates the ways in which the choir embodied a particular version of race relations in New Zealand, and, while their vision for race relations may be regarded as idealistic in contrast to the reality for Maori, it is worth unpacking to understand another perspective of Maori and Pakeha cultural interaction during the twentieth century.

Chapter Five scrutinizes the WMC and their tour of Great Britain from 1937 to 1938. In this new site of experience, I explore the heartland of many European New Zealanders, and also examine the situation of British Methodism in the twentieth
century. The choir interacted with a range of British people who had deeply ingrained ideas about Western art music and who were mostly ignorant of Maori culture. The responses suggest that imperial Britain held variations of opinions regarding the WMC. I examine music as a significant symbol of cultural change and of a unique New Zealand identity, which was developing in this period.

Each of these chapters explores musical interaction between Maori and Pakeha in the 1920s and 1930s. The shared joy of music enabled both groups to improve relationships, whether the encounter was as fleeting as the length of an evening’s concert or as a long-lasting friendship through music, performance and religion. Seamer and his choir were on a mission to bring harmony to New Zealanders. They exemplified an expression of race relations in New Zealand not only in their religious message, but also through musical performance on the stage.
CHAPTER TWO

Singing for Salvation in the Methodist Church

This photograph is similar to a number taken of the Methodist Home Mission Party in the 1920s and 1930s, which were framed in the background by a large flag with the symbol of their Christian faith. What do the symbols and emblems in the flag tell an audience about this religious choir in the twenty-first century? In the very centre of the flag is an open book, with the words “Paipera Tapu,” which means Holy Bible in Maori, clearly visible in bold font.¹ Holding the bible open is a disembodied hand, attired with a black suit and white cuff. This hand could symbolise God or belong to the missionary who brought the word of God to Maori. The bible and hand are framed by what appear to be rays of light coming from the book and moving outwards across the flag in an oval shape. Behind all of these symbols a large white flag

cross spans the width and height of the black flag, reminding viewers and performers alike of the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for mankind. The production of such a flag testifies to some investment in the symbolism of the choir. The flag was used for performances and in advertising, appearing in souvenir photographs.

This chapter places the Methodist Home Mission Party (MHMP) within the context of its Methodist performance traditions. It examines the eighteenth-century musical ideals of the Methodist Church, which were established by the founder John Wesley, and his brother Charles. They valued performance and music making as a pathway to God and salvation. This chapter traces the way these values were transferred to New Zealand in the nineteenth century through missionary endeavours. Not only was music considered a vital element for evangelisation among Maori, but also, that such religious music shared some similarities to Maori musical traditions. This alignment possibly eased the integration between the two cultures.

The MHMP director and missionary, Reverend Arthur John Seamer actively used music as a creative method for evangelisation among Maori in the twentieth century. Tracing Seamer’s religious background lays the groundwork for understanding his renewed interest and use of music to assist with his duties in the Methodist Church. Examining the initial years of the MHMP this chapter seeks to elucidate how Seamer created a long lasting musical institution from within the mechanisms of the Methodist Church and the Home and Maori Mission Departments.

**Methodism: Singing for Salvation**

The founders of the Methodist Church considered music an important vehicle for conversion and worship. Methodism originated from Anglican traditions and grew into a British religious movement. The main founder was John Wesley, a clergyman who, with a strong personality and good organising skills, “ushered in an evangelical revolution when he agreed to preach in the open air in Bristol in 1739.”2 The movement was called Wesleyanism (after its founder), yet its nickname, Methodism

---

2 After having led an unsuccessful mission to British immigrants and Native Americans in Georgia in 1738, Wesley was stirred up by his own spiritual shortcomings in reaching people, and on 28 May 1738 he altered his allegiance from stern religious discipline as God’s way of salvation to simple faith in Christ: Frank Baker, “A Brief History of Methodism,” in *Historical Dictionary of Methodism* (second edition), eds. Charles Yrigoyen Jr. and Susan E. Warrick (Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2005), xxvii.
Methodism gradually separated from Anglicanism and developed distinct characteristics, but did not entirely turn away from its origins.3

The music and hymns sung in Anglican churches were inadequate in Wesley’s point of view.5 This was because of the social hierarchy that existed in most churches at the time, separated parson, squire, and gentry from the common people. Historian Nicholas Temperley notes, “In most churches the clergy and gentry thought it beneath their dignity to sing, while their servants and tenants no doubt felt too inhibited to sing heartily in their presence.”6 In contrast, Wesley encouraged Methodists to sing hymns at family prayers and private gatherings, and at their own public meetings and preaching services in whatever buildings could be appropriated. Services usually took place in an ordinary room, rather than a church, and they tended to be informal, lively, well led, and open for all to attend.7 Outdoor hymn singing also became a badge of the Methodists and people would gather to listen and participate.8 Singing occurred primarily in two types of Methodist meeting: the popular preaching service, which always introduced two hymns, one before and one after the sermon, and the “love feast,” which ended with the singing of several hymns. Even “class meetings,” the small cells of up to eleven members that were the building blocks of Wesley’s organisation, included singing.9

Wesley saw the effectiveness of hymn singing in stirring up religious feelings, in binding a group of disparate people into a worshipping community, and, most importantly, in instructing his flock in the truths of Christianity as he interpreted

6 Temperley and Banfield, *Music and the Wesleys*, 5.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 5-6.
9 Ibid.
“Hymn singing,” argues David Hempton “was an expression of individual and corporate affirmation, an aid to memory, a trigger of religious emotion, and a creator of spiritual identity. It was the Methodist message set to music.” Hempton explains that the Wesley brothers, John as collector and editor and Charles as composer and poetic genius, were keenly aware of the power of hymns in achieving their objectives, such as transmitting complex theological ideas, reaching deep into the will and the emotions of believers through meter, rhyme, and melody, and making connections with the wider culture through the appropriation of popular tunes.

Methodist singing encouraged the involvement of as many people as possible. Wesley was firm on the need for lively singing and participation and he particularly encouraged singing by women. Methodist music brought together popular music and selected texts in the bible, which Wesley hoped would serve the purpose of bringing as many people into the movement as possible. Wesley also encouraged an informal method of singing, one that might appeal to the masses, writing that, “I want the people called Methodist to sing true, the tunes which are in common use among them.”

In order to bring people together successfully, Wesley had definite views about the way Methodist followers should sing hymns. Wesley delineated seven directions for singing, which he requested all Methodists follow. He required that Methodist tunes be learned first and then allowed congregations to learn other styles of music; to sing the exact words as they were printed, aiming to remove misinterpretations; to sing as frequently as possible with the congregation; to sing lustily and with good courage; but also to sing modestly, so as not to be heard above or distinct from the rest; to sing in time, with good rhythm; and above all, to sing spiritually and have an eye to God in every word sung (Wesley would sometimes interrupt hymn singing to ask the people whether they meant what they sang). Wesley wrote about the power of music in his article, “Thoughts on the Power of Music” (1779). This article shows that Wesley was aware of the potential for music to

---

10 Temperley and Banfield, *Music and the Wesleys*, 3.
“raise various passions in the human mind.” Wesley wanted spiritual passions to be excited by music and he understood its power as a vehicle for religious uplift.

The typical Methodist tune was melodious, in the major mode and often had a second, equally tuneful subordinate part, moving in unison mostly in parallel thirds or sixths. The melody was often ornate, with two or three notes to many of the syllables and could easily take ornaments such as the turn, appoggiatura or trill. Mostly the hymns were sung in unison and unaccompanied, as they might be sung anywhere, where resources such as a piano or organ were unavailable. Wesley was fiercely opposed to counterpoint (when a single “part” is added to another it is called “counterpoint”), as he believed harmony and counterpoint detracted from the singular focus that one melody elicited. Wesley was also opposed to the repetition of words. He condemned “complex tunes which it is impossible to sing with devotion,” as well as long, drawn out hallelujahs and anthems (which were typical in Anglican traditions).

Methodist hymn-tunes occupy a restricted field of musical composition, each carrying out specific religious functions. They fall into six classes showing marked varieties of form and style from a range of European regions and centuries. Each class was emphasised by individual missionaries and ministers within their own churches to serve their unique congregations. The categories of hymns and psalms were then further divided into five parts in hymnbooks. Part one contained hymns that reminded worshippers to return to God by describing the pleasantness of religion, the goodness of God, and the reminder that death and judgement would result in either

16 The most typical feature of all Methodist hymns was the final cadence, a chordal progression of the chords I – V – I: Temperley and Banfield, Music and the Wesleys, 9.  
17 Wesley’s own tune books of 1742, 1761 and 1765 have no musical accompaniments: Temperley and Banfield, Music and the Wesleys, 7.  
19 Temperley and Banfield, Music and the Wesleys, 10.  
20 These classes include traditional melodies or folk songs from the fourteenth century; plain songs (or early measured tunes) based on medieval music; psalm tunes, made for metrical paraphrases of the psalter (originating from the sixteenth and seventeenth century); German chorals; eighteenth century tunes; and finally, modern tunes, including music and styles from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Gregory, Praises with Understanding, 112.  
21 Hempton, Methodism, 69.
the reward of heaven, or the punishment of hell. Part two typically describes the
difference between formal and informal religion; part three contains prayers for
repentance and recovery from relapses into bad behaviour; part four envisages the
believer rejoicing, fighting, praying for redemption; and finally, part five includes
hymns of corporate life and celebrations of the Methodist community. Nineteenth-
century Methodist hymnbooks tended to concentrate on Christian life as a pilgrimage
and as a journey from earthly despair to heavenly blessing.22

Methodism was transferred to new countries by emigrating pioneers who
spread their message through music and religion in the nineteenth century. The
Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society was set up in 1813 and began missionary
activities in countries including New Zealand, Australia, Ceylon, Java, South Africa,
Sierra Leone, Canada and the United States of America.23 The Reverend Samuel
Leigh established the first Methodist Mission at Whangaroa in the North Island of
New Zealand in June 1822.24 Maori responses and behaviour toward mission work in
the early period had “little internal conflict or external pressure and this was the
period when they [Maori] listened most when missionaries preached, began observing
the tapu of the Sabbath, and erecting church buildings.”25 The medium of the hymn
conveyed the Methodist message to their congregations. As Methodist music collector
Arthur Gregory wrote, “On paper a hymn is a dead form: given musical utterance it
lives.”26 Thus the medium and the message were intertwined. Historian John

22 Ibid., 70. 
23 Temperley and Banfield, Music and the Wesleys, 50. 
24 Leigh began a long drawn out campaign to persuade the British Wesleyan Mission
Authorities to open a Mission in New Zealand in close co-operation with the
Anglicans. At first he was unsuccessful, but he would not be silenced. Even though
the Mission Office in Britain was carrying a heavy overdraft on their funds and saw
no prospect of commencing a new field at such a distance from the homeland, they
gave Leigh permission to make a personal drive for funds and goods for barter. He
travelled up and down England pleading the cause and supporting this with the
account of his personal observations and experiences in the Bay of Islands: G. I.
Laurenson, Te Tahi Weteriana: History of Methodism in New Zealand, 1913-1972
(Wesley Historical Society, 1972), 6. See also W. A. Chambers, “Leigh, Samuel –
Biography,” from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara – the
(accessed 8 February 2012).
Zealand 1819-27 (Auckland University Press and Oxford University Press, 1974),
128.
26 Gregory, Praises with Understanding, 1.
Thomson notes that from the beginning when the two cultures met, “the greatest musical influence came from the missionaries.”

Missionaries had a musical impact on Maori in part because of the vast number of hymnbooks available. McLean argues that the rapid spread of hymn singing throughout the Maori population was aided by the manifest ability of Maori to learn to read and write quickly, as well as by the publication of vast quantities of hymnbooks on the mission presses, often in editions of many thousands. The aptitude of Maori to learn and perform music and their apparent love of singing may have been a factor in drawing many early converts to Christianity. Official hymnbooks were published for use in public worship and every thirty years or so, Methodists published an official hymnal for their area, with the first dating to 1784. Charles Wesley apparently composed some nine thousand hymns and sacred poems in his lifetime. This in turn meant that numerous hymnbooks were transferred to New Zealand for use at church services.

Methodist missionaries and other denominations soon realised that to convert more Maori through musical means, they needed to publish a number of Christian hymns in the Maori language. McLean notes that as early as 1827, Mr R. Davis, of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), had printed four hundred copies of a book containing seven hymns in Maori, with two more books containing nineteen and twenty-seven hymns respectively, following in 1830 and 1833. The earliest publication of hymns in Maori by the Methodist Church appears to have been in 1837 when thirty five hymns, including fourteen taken from the CMS hymnal, were printed together with prayers and extracts from the Gospels. From 1839 onwards, hymns were published as a supplement to the Wesleyan Maori prayer book, beginning with thirty hymns and rising by 1894 to one hundred and fourteen. By 1860 the number of hymns available in Maori had risen to fifty-two and by 1876 to fifty-six. In 1883,

---

33 Ibid.
the definitive CMS collection of hymns, called *He himene mo te Karakia ki te Atua* (Hymns in the Maori Language), was first published.\(^{34}\)

Although missionaries used the Maori language to assist their evangelisation of Maori, language was often challenging. Historian J. Owens notes that those early missionaries had to learn the various meanings and contexts of Maori words. Owens points out that the word “atua” was taken up by missionaries to describe their Christian God, yet this term did not fully translate into English, thus posing a language barrier not only for communication but for evangelisation.\(^{35}\) Yet music and hymn singing were still useful in helping to overcome language barriers because meaning could be conveyed through sentiment and conviction through performing a song. Gradually, missionaries were successful in reaching some Maori and in one community by 1842, according to the biographer of the Wesleyan missionary James Watkin, a knowledge of hymns, prayers and catechism had spread at the hands of converts to every settlement south of Moeraki in the South Island: “Night and morning in every village one could hear the sounds of song and prayer.”\(^{36}\)

Later in the nineteenth century, tensions emerged between Maori and Pakeha. The unwitting introduction of diseases, the unwarranted encroachment on lands, and the despoilment of land erupted into wars between some Maori tribes and the New Zealand government in the 1860s.\(^{37}\) These wars had the effect of complicating the relationship between the two people. Some Maori chose to fight alongside the Government in these wars, while others opposed the land conflicts sometimes with violence and in some cases with passive resistance.\(^{38}\) The position of missionaries in New Zealand was complicated by their role as mediators of both religion and as European representatives. For some Maori, the events that took place during the Land Wars were a catalyst to doubt individual missionaries as well as the

\(^{34}\) Ibid.

\(^{35}\) Owens, *Prophets in the Wilderness*, 129.


\(^{38}\) The residents at Parihaka in the Taranaki region chose passive resistance against the encroaching land surveyors and road builders in the 1870s and 1880s.
While there were also other factors that made the interaction between Maori and Pakeha problematic, music continued to be very important for evangelisation.

McLean argues that Maori music was incompatible with European musical traditions. He suggests that because there is no evidence that early settlers influenced Maori music, this is proof that Maori and European music systems were different enough to be mutually incomprehensible. Indeed the observations of French navigator Duperrey lend weight to this argument. Duperrey, who visited New Zealand for two weeks in 1824, judged Maori music to be monotonous, and wrote:

> If their singing was far from having the advantage of pleasing us, ours certainly did not win their approval. They received our most popular ballads with the coldest indifference and the tough fibres of their souls were not in the least shaken by the martial airs, which delight and excite a European.

However, declaring that all Maori music was incompatible with European music places limitations on understanding the musical interactions that occurred between the two cultures. This thesis argues that there was indeed compatibility between Maori and European music traditions, though perhaps not in the musical sense that McLean suggests. By focusing on these instances of compatibility one is able to explore the alignments that occurred within the developing New Zealand music culture.

Methodist and Maori music traditions had some areas of alignment. As explained in Chapter One, the different song types are grouped into two categories – recited and sung – both of which fulfil a purpose for formal and informal ceremonies within Maori culture. As in Methodist traditions, sung styles of Maori music are melodically organised, and the melody repeats line by line in tandem with the text. Keeping the whole group together, the tempos are usually slower and there is rhythmic variety, which can also be heard in Methodist hymns. Waiata are performed by groups of singers with a song leader who was either male or female.

---

Furthermore, both recited and sung genres of Maori song, when sung by groups, are unison or monophonic on a limited range of tones.\textsuperscript{43} In all of these Maori characteristics there are similarities and even direct comparative exercises for performances of Methodist hymns.

As each Methodist hymn was designed to fulfil a purpose for worship, Maori custom also demanded that each performance and each song or recitation fulfil a purpose. “Maori used speech and song to ‘publish’ for everyday life and posterity,” writes Rachael Te Awhina Ka’ai-Mahuta, including for “instruction in art or manufacture; news; opinion or feeling; appeals to atua; and historical chronicle.”\textsuperscript{44} The topic of the song was meant to be appropriate for the occasion, demonstrating, for example, a connection between visiting tribe and the home tribe.\textsuperscript{45} To sing without an object, as when travelling alone, was called “koohau” and was regarded as a bad omen by Maori.\textsuperscript{46} While hymns served spiritual and religious functions, such as to discuss pilgrimage or salvation, for Maori music, songs were often used for educative purposes because, “when you don’t have a written medium… people aren’t going to recite and recall… so waiata was a tool, a mechanism by which the language could be retained.”\textsuperscript{47}

Another way that Maori and Methodist music traditions were similar was in the focus on spiritualism. Hymns were used to attain a level of spirituality and closeness with God, and in a similar way, Maori too, used music to praise, thank, curse and appease their own pre-contact Gods. Elsdon Best describes Maori use of song:

\begin{quote}
He sang himself into a fight, and out of it. He sang to avenge an insult or a trifling slight; he sang when a relative died, and also when he lost a fishhook. He sang when he was short of food and in days of plenty. He sang his prophetic visions and his dreams; he sang his requests for military assistance. He sang when he planted his crops, and sang when he slew [sic.]
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{44} Rachael Te Awhina Ka’ai-Mahuta, “He kupu tuku iho mo tenei reanga: A Critical analysis of waiata and haka as commentaries and archives of Maori political history” (PhD diss., Auckland University of Technology, 2010), 127.
\textsuperscript{45} McLean, \textit{Maori Music}, 111.
\textsuperscript{46} Herbert Williams, \textit{A Dictionary of the Maori Language} (Wellington: Government Printer, 7\textsuperscript{th} edition, 1975).
\textsuperscript{47} Ka’ai-Mahuta, “He kupu tuku iho mo tenei reanga,” 124.
them, and so he sang his way through life, and, when that ended, his friends sang a lament for him.\textsuperscript{48}

Indeed historian Adrienne Kaeppler argues that many Maori found few faults with the tenets of Christianity, which shared with the old Maori religion many points of agreement, particularly on notions of an afterlife.\textsuperscript{49} Some people accepted completely the Christian system of thought; others adapted it to their cultural ways. Maori were accustomed to music having a purpose and Methodism, with its strong musical structure and direction, aligned with aspects of Maori performance traditions and may have eased the evangelising process for some Maori.

Maori performance traditions also aligned with Methodist expectations for expressive and passionate performance. Not only did Maori song need an appropriate occasion for performance, but as Elsdon Best described in 1929, reliance was also placed on song as a mode of expression of emotions. “Songs were composed in connection with every known feeling, with every human activity,” writes Best. “The Maori broke into song to express joy, anger, sadness, love, hatred, contempt, ridicule, mirth, and the whole range of emotions known to man…”\textsuperscript{50} Emotions were deliberately invoked and encouraged by certain Maori musical styles. Maori war dance, sometimes called peruperu or haka, was performed immediately before battle, at intervals during the battle and afterwards if the battle was successful. McLean notes that as a performance, peruperu can be regarded as a demonstration of rage.\textsuperscript{51} Maori may have found the “passions” encouraged by the Methodist musical style to be comparatively lacking, but for some Maori, the Methodist attention to music and its place within the religious performance culture may have been an important factor in encouraging participation and eventual conversion.

\textsuperscript{49} Kaeppler, “Musical Influences from Abroad,” 935.
\textsuperscript{50} Best, \textit{Maori songs}, 2.
\textsuperscript{51} McLean, \textit{Maori Music}, 47.
Reverend Arthur John Seamer

Reverend Arthur John Seamer was a Methodist missionary who advocated the use of music to evangelise Maori in the twentieth century. Seamer was the youngest of four children of William Seamer and his wife, Jane Matilda Townley.\textsuperscript{52} Seamer was born in 1878, to this humble British immigrant family in Tongala, Victoria, Australia. It is tempting to devote an entire chapter to the life of Reverend Seamer, not least because of his importance in the creation and management of the Methodist Home Mission Party. In this section, however, I will explore the religious and musical aspects of Seamer’s biography that may have led him to establish the MHMP in 1924.

\textsuperscript{52} There exists a discrepancy in the birth date of William Seamer. One account records William as living from 1830-1880, while another that he lived from 1831-1881. For the purposes of this thesis, I have selected 1830 as the year William was born, as Arthur himself has put this as the date: Memoir of Arthur Seamer, Folder 55 (Auckland: Methodist Church of New Zealand Archives), 3.
Seamer was influenced by Methodist musical traditions throughout his childhood and adulthood. Seamer’s father William died in 1880 when Seamer was just two years old. The religious sentiments of Seamer’s father seem to have played a small role in his life. William fostered a strong religious community in their home region. He and neighbouring farmers gathered local children to attend Sunday school and united to build a church, which was situated about a mile from the Seamer family home.\textsuperscript{53} Seamer’s Methodism mainly came from his mother. Jane Seamer came from a highly religious Methodist family and she held the belief that while independence and freedom of thought was important, a strong religious upbringing was essential for her children. Consequentially, strong Methodist connections ran through the Seamer family. Arthur’s two older brothers William and Samuel both became prominent Methodist Ministers in Australia.\textsuperscript{54} Their religious practices most definitely included the musical traditions of Methodism.

Seamer’s full immersion in religion came in his late teens. When he was sixteen, Seamer moved to Melbourne to board with his mother’s sister Emily, and her husband, Stephen Jeffrey.\textsuperscript{55} His uncle was a leading Methodist preacher in Melbourne and they lived by the church.\textsuperscript{56} Arthur lived with them for six months until the opportunity arose to live rent-free above the harness factory premises where he worked. From 1894 until mid-way through 1895 Seamer lived quietly, working and studying in solitude. When seventeen, Seamer was greatly impressed by the earnestness, enthusiasm and practical social work that Salvation Army workers carried out in the poor districts in Melbourne. For most of 1895 Seamer gave all his

\textsuperscript{53} Memoir of Seamer, 3.
\textsuperscript{54} William became a Minister in the Victorian Conference and was a leader in social reform movements. He was particularly concerned with reducing the risks of gambling in communities: “Letter to the Editor by William Seamer,” *The Argus* (Tuesday 28 October 1941), 3. Samuel worked for fifteen years as the Sunday School Superintendent and was a valued local preacher at Maryborough in Queensland: “Reverend Arthur Seamer,” *The New Zealand Methodist Times* (July 5 1924), 3. There is little evidence on what happened to Seamer’s eldest sibling, Edith.
\textsuperscript{56} Memoir of Seamer, 4.
spare time to slum work in what he called, “Darker Melbourne,” where he gained first hand experience of poverty and the problems of the poor.  

Seamer’s work among the poor prompted him to join the church. In 1896, the Salvation Army launched an appeal for missionaries to serve in Indonesia and New Zealand. Seamer applied for a missionary position in Borneo. Although he was brought up Methodist, the Salvation Army offered him the chance to help others. He wrote, “I had always felt I should do missionary work and this seemed the most likely door leading to it.” When Arthur applied and was initially accepted to train as a missionary he was eighteen years old. However, his relatively young age meant that the missionary registrars for the Borneo mission-training course rejected him. Seamer was sent instead to the New Zealand Salvation Army mission in 1897.

Seamer’s experience with the Salvation Army exposed him to another musical performance tradition. Music was deemed an important part of the religious and devotional aspect of the Salvation Army. Not only was singing a way to show one’s devotion, music was a way to internalise faith and to feel emotionally moved by the content of the lyrics and the soaring melodies created by brass bands and choral singers. As historian Henry Gariepy aptly put it: “music, the universal language of mankind, is also the lingua franca of the [Salvation] Army world. It bonds its multinational members in an effective proclamation of the gospel message and nurtures the spiritual life of its followers.”

Seamer would undoubtedly have been influenced by the musical traditions of the Salvation Army, which used music to challenge convention. Salvationist music was often loud and supported by brass bands in outdoor environments – encouraging people to listen and participate. Their musical activities sometimes incited local government anger. By 1884 in Britain, over six hundred Salvationists were jailed for obstructing streets while parading with brass bands and holding open-air services.

The founder, William Booth, urged that the songs that made the best singing were

58 Memoir of Seamer, 5.
59 While initially disappointed about his rejection for work in Indonesia, Arthur learned that his father had been deeply interested in the Maori race and that he would be following up one of his studies in mission work: Ibid.
those composed in the simple language of the people (not dissimilar to the words of Wesley). The word “hymn” was dropped from the Army’s vocabulary because it was thought to be “churchy” and therefore to be avoided. Many working-class people, accustomed to the audience participation of the music halls, enjoyed the freedom and entertainment of the Army meetings but would not go to a more formal church service. The Salvation Army was one of the later additions of Christian denominations to arrive in New Zealand, being officially established in 1883 when two young British officers unfurled a Salvation Army flag at Port Chalmers in Dunedin, declaring their arrival and intent to bring the word of God. The denomination emphasised its identity as a Christian mission, free from what it viewed as ecclesiastical trappings – its mode was pragmatic rather than doctrinaire, emphasising action and public displays of religion.

The time Seamer spent in the Salvation Army was short compared to his eventual life-long career in the Methodist Church. After his initial training in the Salvation Army Maori mission at Gisborne, Seamer worked among the Maori in Taranaki and in the Urewera and Taupo districts. During these years he learned to speak Maori fluently and specialised in Maori work. Seamer held rank as a Lieutenant within the Salvation Army and gained a great deal of experience in the three years he spent training and working among Maori communities, later remarking that those initial years of service gave him a sound introduction to the undercurrents of Maori life. For most of that time he slept on mats and ate with his fingers from flax baskets alongside his Maori congregations. During this time he made friends with many young Maori people. Seamer, reflecting on these relationships fifty years later, remarked that:

I taught them something of the Christian truth and of the great civilised world, while they taught me of their Maori customs and traditions and some of them were in training as tohungas at that time. I listened quite as carefully to them as they listened to me. We were brothers together in spirit. I’ll put it this way, I

62 Gariepy, Christianity in Action, 25.
64 Gariepy, Christianity in Action, 120.
65 Ibid., 59.
sat at their feet while we were discussing Maori things and
they sat at my feet while we discussing Christian civilisation.\textsuperscript{66}

With an open and equal stage for debate and education, both Seamer and the Maori he
spoke with gained better understanding of each other. He learned early on that the
way to souls was not only through preaching, but also through listening and gaining
respect from Maori, especially through music.

Seamer decided to resign from his position in the Salvation Army in 1901. Mission
work ceased among Maori when policy changes were carried out by the
Salvation Army’s national administration.\textsuperscript{67} As the programme no longer offered the
vision of Maori development about which he felt so strongly, Seamer felt it was time
to move on. Methodist ministers in New Zealand were aware of the disturbance
among the Salvation Army missionaries and sought to use it to their advantage.
Reverend S. W. White and Father Hammond of the Methodist Church had singled
Seamer out as a missionary of worth and when they became aware of his resignation,
they immediately offered him a Home Mission post at Kaeo, in Whangaroa. Seamer
reflected, “I resigned and applied one week, and took up my appointment the next!”
In 1901 Seamer formally commenced service as a Methodist Home Missionary in
Whangaroa to minister to the Maori and Pakeha people of that Circuit, spanning a
large distance from Kerikeri to Kaitaia.\textsuperscript{68} Seamer’s career developed rapidly,
particularly after he trained to be a Minister and was ordained in 1907.\textsuperscript{69}

When Seamer began working for the Methodist Church in New Zealand, it
was organised in a nation-wide circuit system. This circuit system divided the North
Island into five Mission Districts, each of which was assigned a Home Mission
Superintendent as well as a Native (Maori) Superintendent. The South Island Mission
was an exception, and was left intact for several Ministers to operate. The day-to-day
running of each circuit was governed by a number of ministers and deaconesses in

\textsuperscript{66} Memoir of Seamer, 5.
\textsuperscript{67} Michael King, \textit{Te Puea} (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 175; and Hirini
Kaa, “Nga hahi – Maori and Christian denominations - Salvation Army”, \textit{Te Ara - the
christian-denominations/6 (accessed 20 August 2011).
\textsuperscript{68} Ruawai D. Rakena. “Seamer, Arthur John – Biography” in the \textit{Dictionary of New
Zealand Biography, Te Ara - the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand},
\textsuperscript{69} Memoir of Seamer, 7.
ministering to the Methodist congregations. European mission work was overseen by one General Superintendent, which was carried out by Reverend T. G. Brooke from 1915 until 1924. A General Superintendent also supervised Maori Mission work throughout the circuits, which was carried out by Reverend T. G. Hammond until 1920. The South Island Agent would travel continuously, spending about two days at each settlement on a monthly visitation to Christchurch and Dunedin and on the quarterly visit to Southland. Twice a year they would visit Marlborough and spent about a fortnight in the settlements adjacent to Blenheim and Picton.

The Home and Maori Mission Departments had always been a target for criticism by Conference delegates. The departments never enjoyed adequate financial support and never had enough men to function smoothly. Yet the departments were indispensable to the Methodist Church, expected to encourage beginners and retain congregations. In 1917 those who attended Methodist services included 78,772 European Methodist worshippers and 8,900 Maori worshippers. By 1926, the number of Methodist worshippers had increased to 121,212, and of this number only 4,066 Maori (or 6.39 per cent of the total Maori population) were affiliated with Methodism. A large number of Maori had transferred to the Ratana Church since 1918 (11,567) and may explain this decrease in Methodist Maori. Although money was not always allocated accordingly, the declared aim of the Home and Maori Mission Departments was to hasten the integration of Maori and European into the church, while hoping to bring about better relations between the two people.

---

72 Hames, *Coming of Age*, 57.
73 The Wesleyan and Methodist Church collected these figures. Note that the 1917 statistics incorporated Primitive Methodists who had amalgamated with the Wesleyans to form the Methodist Church in 1913: E. W. Hames, *Out of the Common Way: The European Church in the Colonial Era 1840-1913* (Auckland: Wesley Historical Society, 1972), 51-52 and 78-79.
74 In 1926, a total of 63,670 Maori were recorded in the census, including Maori of mixed blood: “Religious Professions,” *Dominion of New Zealand, Population Census of Maori and Half-Caste Population, 1926* (Wellington: W. A. G. Skinner, Government Printer, 1929), 7.
75 Note that 3,804 Maori wrote their religious affiliation as “Mihinare,” which could be translated as “Missionary.” It is reasonable to assume that a number of these native missionaries were Methodist considering there were almost fifty Native Missionaries by 1937: *NZMT* (20 November 1937), 4; and “Religious Professions,” 7.
76 Hames, *Coming of Age*, 58.
Seamer’s experience among Maori qualified him to take up a senior role in the Methodist Church by the 1920s. Seamer was promoted to General Superintendent of the Maori Mission in 1920. This role required Seamer to visit each Maori community in the Methodist Circuits annually. Maori custom demands that a chief never travel alone when visiting settlements; and many of the tribes he visited accorded Seamer the nickname of “the Great White Chief.” Most of the tribes insisted that supporters travelled with Seamer on his journeys between Maori villages. Some would continue with Seamer for several weeks until they felt that others capable of giving him the necessary support had linked up with him.

Seamer’s connection to Maori meant he was an advocate for their needs and concerns in the church. At the annual Methodist Conference held February 1923 in Dunedin, Seamer presented his findings on the Maori Mission and race relations between Maori and Pakeha. Seamer believed that the department needed an aggressive approach to counter the disorganised and financially insecure conditions that had emerged as a consequence of World War One. A major concern Seamer held was that the mission programme was divided between Maori and Pakeha, which created pressure on already limited resources. He believed that the time had arrived when certain localities in the North Island and the South must aim for cooperation rather than separate mission organisations. “Their Maori Mission,” Seamer declared, “had no future before them as a separate institution. Their future was only in linking up with the Europeans.”

In response to his demand for greater unity between the mission departments, the annual Conference elected Seamer to the position of General Superintendent of both the Home Mission Department and the Maori Mission Departments in 1924. The combined role meant that work could begin on bringing about greater amalgamation at all levels in the two departments. Seamer’s appointment also answered the economic problems for the Home Mission Fund. Seamer was pressured by the

---

77 “Flow chart of Home and Maori Mission General Superintendents,” Home and Maori Mission Departments files and correspondence, Methodist Church Archives, Auckland.
79 Hames, Coming of Age, 58.
Conference to produce more income from the inefficient Maori mission work across New Zealand. Some delegates argued that too much money was being spent on the Maori Mission Department in proportion to the income it provided the Church. Seamer’s dual role helped to curb expenditure by paying one man for the work of two, and he could also be a mediator of financial vision. The delegates moved that the estimated income for the Department should have an annual ten per cent increase, equalling around one thousand pounds in 1924. These economic imperatives inspired Seamer to find creative solutions to reach the increase demanded by the delegates.

With the combination of the two missions, more unity and vision was brought to the mission programme. Seamer promptly outlined his objectives and lines of action for the Home Mission, the Maori Mission and the Church Extension Department in the New Zealand Methodist Times in 1924. Seamer’s objectives were: the furtherance of the Christian evangelisation of New Zealand; the propagation throughout the Dominion the Methodist interpretation of Christianity in practical life and experience; the intensive and extensive development of work in areas permanently occupied by ministers and the establishment of new causes in neglected areas; and the improvement and extension of work among Maori.

As well as outlining his objectives, Seamer proposed methods for making the changes within his departments. His “lines of action” were to awaken interest and promote enthusiasm in the Mission of Methodism; to investigate the problems which affected the extension of Methodism; to secure an adequate number of efficient agents and to increase the number of voluntary workers; to develop cooperation between the Maori Stations and the ordinary Circuit organisation; to promote and support aggressive evangelistic work; and finally, to establish a Methodist Literature and Colporteur Society (MLCS). For a number of years the Department kept a van on the road for the MLCS, with a driver who sold cheap books to remote areas throughout New Zealand where communications were poor and “the sects were better represented than the churches.” Seamer advocated a forward thinking programme and creative solutions from the outset of his tenure as General Superintendent.

83 “Objectives,” NZMT (12 April 1924), 13.
85 Hames, Coming of Age, 59.
The Methodist Home Mission Party

Seamer’s role as General Superintendent was arduous and required annual visits to both Maori and Pakeha Methodist Circuits throughout New Zealand. One of the greatest problems confronting him on these annual visitations was how to keep in line with Maori custom, as well as visit European Churches as he went on his rounds. He could not easily take his usual Maori retinue who accompanied him on his travels into Pakeha Churches. Although there was no formal separation between Pakeha and Maori in churches throughout the country, it appears an informal separation occurred in many churches. Seamer found that “no line [was] ever drawn between the two races in workshops, in offices, in dancing hall, or football or cricket field. But often when they came to Church life the line was drawn, and in one district the use of the Sunday school was refused to Maori children.”

After carefully reviewing the situation in 1924, Seamer attached Maori helpers to himself, for periods varying from three to twelve months, to assist him in both European and Maori Methodist mission work, leading them “up and down the land singing and speaking.” He named the group the Methodist Home Mission Party (although it was often referred to as the deputation choir in contemporary articles), and hoped they would bridge the gap between the separated Maori and Pakeha church traditions. A report in the *New Zealand Methodist Times* noted, “As Mr Seamer has only one hobby apart from his work, and that hobby is music, it was natural that the musical talents of the party should be developed, and at length, while the same representation principles were still observed, the fine inspirational, educational and musical programmes given by the party brought it into great prominence.”

The MHMP began touring the Mission Circuits around New Zealand. Seamer had two small parties in 1924. There were five members on the South Island tour from April to June and then, after a few changes, five members on the North Island tour from June to December. The South Island group varied in ages and vocations, and included two Methodist Native Ministers, Reverend Eruera Te Tuhi of Kaipara and Reverend Te Aho-o-Te-Rangi Pihama from the Waikato, two young women, Ara Winiata of Hokianga and Ruihi Ruamoetahuna from the Taranaki region.

---

88 “Changing Duties and Changing Needs,” 4; and Hames, *Coming of Age*, 59.
89 “Changing duties with changing needs,” 4.
and ten-year old Rongo (Dolly) Kahui of Rahotu.\textsuperscript{91} One report on the party revealed that the members:

Possess sweet tuneful voices, and the weird waiatas, sacred poi and other action songs, solos, duets and quartets are a great delight. Both the men are natural orators and make very fine speeches. Rongo (Dolly) is a little girl of ten years and wins all the hearts as robed in a mat of kiwi feathers, she sings her solos.\textsuperscript{92}

Rongo, Ara and Ruihi left the deputation group at the end of the South Island tour. Meha Ngawhau and Teataarangi Waata replaced them for the North Island section of the tour. Another addition was Iroriana, who was a budding speaker with a good tenor voice.\textsuperscript{93} It is important to note that from the outset this party did not outline tribal affiliations of the members. Seamer was not interested in recording these details and noted only the region in New Zealand that the members hailed from. Through this process of changing affiliations, Seamer privileged a broader Maori identity over Maori tribal identities.

\textsuperscript{91} “Where Methodism Stands,” \textit{NZMT} (12 April 1924), 13; and “Home Mission Anniversary Meeting Pamphlet,” Personal Collection of Mori Pickering (April, c. 1920s), Dunedin. These members are also listed in the \textit{Otago Witness} (20 May 1924), 49.

\textsuperscript{92} “Our Home Missions,” \textit{NZMT} (12 April 1924), 13.

\textsuperscript{93} “Our Home Missions,” \textit{NZMT} (30 August 1924), 3.
Seamer’s method of recruitment was based presumably on pre-existing connections when he began work as General Superintendent. The first priority in choosing a member was their true conversion to the Christian faith, and secondly, that they be ideally suited to performing constantly and living out of suitcases. Some of these early “companions” (as he always used to call them) were outstanding speakers, others were singers – while others again were nominated by their people and accepted by Seamer for this work merely because they in themselves were an illustration of the work the mission was doing.94 Seamer’s companions were given the opportunity to perform and speak in Methodist churches and halls, providing room, he hoped, for the growth of religious equality.

From the beginning, the members of the MHMP were from different tribes. Some were from the same region, but were typically selected for the skills they possessed rather than favouring just one particular tribe. As time went on, the choir became increasingly representative of Maori throughout New Zealand. A degree of rivalry rapidly developed between various tribes as to which of them would have representation in the touring party.\textsuperscript{95} Seamer was careful to arrange that each of the tribes had a member involved at some point, even including Maori as far away as the Chatham Islands. The importance that Seamer placed on having Maori representatives from Maori tribes may have been due to appeasing rivalry, yet it may also have been a process to generate a sense of Maoridom in New Zealand because when they came together to perform, less emphasis was made of their tribe and more of their Maori culture. The stage was a venue for Maori tribal representatives to intersect and influence each other.

While the majority of those early members were North Island based, by 1927, South Island Maori were also represented. Rangimarie Ellison, always known as Mori, became a member of Seamer’s choir in 1927.\textsuperscript{96} Mori became acquainted with Reverend Seamer through the Otakau Peninsula organist, Mrs Clark, who referred a letter sent by Reverend Seamer to her. He requested an Otakau regional representative for his touring party. “Naturally I was interested,” wrote Mori, “and on asking my father his reply was, ‘Please yourself, my dear.’”\textsuperscript{97} Mori was thrilled to take up this role and travelled almost immediately to Te Aroha where the choir were stationed in the North Island.\textsuperscript{98}

Although the choir members came from different tribes, they often found cohesion by performing Methodist hymns together. Their Methodism was a characteristic the group shared with their mostly Methodist audiences. The question of how such a diverse range of Maori could come together to perform in a unified

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{96} Born in 1909 at Otakau, she belongs to the Ngai Tahu, the main South Island tribe, and to the Te Atiawa of Taranaki. After attending the local primary school, she went to board at Te Wai Pounamu Maori Girl’s School in Christchurch: Ruth Fry, \textit{Out of the Silence: Methodist Women of Aotearoa, 1822-1985} (Christchurch: Methodist Publishing, 1987), 181.
\textsuperscript{97} Memoirs of Mori Pickering, Private Collection, Dunedin.
manner can be explained by the Maori disposition to learn music quickly and by ear. They presumably learned the songs of each other’s tribes, which were accompanied in performance with a narrative of the significance of the music and poetry. This process of combining Maori tribal musical traditions added to the hybridised tapestry of New Zealand musical culture. It is also likely that the MHMP members composed songs specifically for their tours, to bring not only unity to the group, but ownership of their duty for the Methodist Church. Chapter three will explore in detail the repertoire and musical styles that the MHMP performed.

Where did the choir perform during that first year of touring? The journey made in 1924 foreshadows the annual tours that the MHMP made throughout the 1920s, and therefore deserves to be discussed in some detail. The map on the following page traces the tour of both the South Island and the North Island in 1924.
Map 1: The Methodist Home Mission Party itinerary for the North and South Islands of New Zealand, 1924.
In 1924 the choir began their eight-month tour of the Methodist circuits throughout the South Island. From mid-April until late May, Seamer and the MHMP visited the Otago region, and worked their way through South Otago, Central Otago and then in Southland. At each region they visited both small communities of Methodist parishioners, such as St Kilda, St Clair, and Abbotsford in the Dunedin area, and the major city churches.\textsuperscript{99} In Southland they performed in a variety of churches, town halls and schoolrooms, in communities such as Otautau, Nightcaps, Tuatapere, Colac Bay, Invercargill and Bluff.\textsuperscript{100} They would spend up to two or three days in larger community churches during their tour and would give a morning, afternoon or evening performance while visiting smaller churches. After they had toured Southland, the group travelled up the east coast towards the Canterbury region. In Canterbury, they spent over a month dedicated to performing in the different towns. The group then carried on up the east coast, performing in Blenheim and Picton.\textsuperscript{101}

An extensive North Island tour began in June and lasted until mid December. They began with a short tour of the Wellington region, before performing in quick succession in Wanganui, Taranaki and then the Waikato districts. A brief tour of the Auckland district was followed by a longer tour of Northland, visiting towns such as Kaeo, Russell, Oruru and Mangonui.\textsuperscript{102} After two weeks of holiday at the end of July, the choir then toured Wellington extensively in August, visiting the numerous churches and communities in the surrounding district.\textsuperscript{103} For example, on 16 August the choir travelled to the Lower Hutt Methodist Circuit, to celebrate the Home Mission Anniversary Meeting at Taita Church. In a report to the \textit{NZMT}, Mr Mitchell wrote:

\begin{quote}
The new Maori party, under Seamer, which has just visited Fielding, were greeted on Sunday and Monday with an overcrowded Church, every available inch of square space being occupied, whilst large numbers were unable to gain admission. It is safe to say that never in the history of this circuit has there been such an inspirational, educational or more successful Home
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{99} Advertisement for the Methodist Home Mission Party in Broad Bay, Dunedin, 1924, Moss Collection (Christchurch: MCNZA).
\textsuperscript{100} \textit{NZMT} (12 April 1924), 13 and \textit{NZMT} (26 April 1924), 12.
\textsuperscript{101} \textit{NZMT} (10 May 1924), 13 and \textit{NZMT} (24 May 1924), 3.
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{NZMT} (21 June 1924), 3.
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{NZMT} (19 July 1924), 3; \textit{NZMT} (2 August 1924), 3; \textit{NZMT} (16 August 1924), 3.
Mission Anniversary. It was a happy thought that brought the Maori Party into being and the opportunity of hearing the case for Home and Maori Missions put by the Superintendent and his helpers were highly appreciated.\textsuperscript{104}

From Wellington the choir then moved up the east coast of the North Island. They performed throughout the Hawkes Bay region before heading back across to the West Coast where they spent time in Wanganui.\textsuperscript{105} From October to mid-November, the MHMP made an extensive tour of the Auckland district.\textsuperscript{106} They finished the nationwide tour with a short visit to Tauranga, in the Bay of Plenty.\textsuperscript{107} In December the choir finished with a week performing and visiting the Ratana Pa, just out of Wanganui, where Seamer had forged strong links with Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana (1873-1939), the Maori prophet and founder of the Ratana Church.\textsuperscript{108} Ratana came from Methodist and Anglican roots and was a fervent Christian man, and because of this Methodist connection Seamer chose to adopt a “carefully considered policy of silence on theological differences” so as not alienate the Ratana movement from mainstream Christianity.\textsuperscript{109}

The quality of performance and musical cohesion of the MHMP was typically consistent. Time was spent perfecting their performances, be it individually or collectively, while on tour or at two unofficial rehearsal locations. Seamer said in an interview:

The choir does not rehearse together all the year, as many of the members belonging to different tribes live some considerable distance from the central rehearsal centre. The music, however, is practised individually, so that when they eventually come together it is only a matter of balance and general choral instruction.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{104} A. Mitchell, \textit{NZMT} (30 August 1924), 3.
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{NZMT} (30 August 1924), 3 and \textit{NZMT} (10 September 1924), 3.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{NZMT} (11 October 1924), 3 and \textit{NZMT} (25 October 1924), 3.
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{NZMT} (8 November 1924), 3.
\textsuperscript{108} Ratana reportedly received the Holy Spirit in 1918 and became the Mangai (Mouthpiece) for God. His following grew rapidly among Maori: \textit{NZMT} (6 December 1924), 17.
\textsuperscript{109} Throughout Ratana’s lifetime Seamer maintained a close friendship, and his commitment to young people and their education resulted in the establishment of a school at Ratana Pa serviced by Methodist lay teachers and deaconesses. Ratana honoured Seamer by commemorating his name in the township of Ratana, and naming a street after him: Rakena, “Seamer, Arthur John – Biography.”
\textsuperscript{110} “Waiata, Maori Choir,” \textit{Examiner} (10 April 1937), 1.
The rehearsal centre varied and some years it was held at Te Aroha, as Mori Pickering recalled when she joined the choir in 1927. In other years, Hinerangi Hikuroa recalled that when she joined the choir in 1928, “we lived in a rented house in Castlecliff, Wanganui, and we spent most of the time practising.”

The choir became a home away from home for members throughout their training sessions and long tours. Seamer came to be known as Father Seamer, a term that reflected his spiritual leadership. “Our parents had given Rev. Seamer full control and there was never any question once he had decided an issue,” such as having to read the lesson in one of the main churches, recalled Pickering. Pickering noted, “The members had their minor ups and downs, their joys and sorrows, but on the whole they were a happy family group. In the early days I can honestly say that I cannot recall discord among its members.”

Seamer took responsibility for the education of the younger choir members throughout their extensive tours. A number of the choir members were school aged, including Rongo and Hinerangi, and the duties of the choir meant they could not regularly participate in formal education. Seamer took it upon himself to educate the choir members in English. Hinerangi Hikuroa was one of the youngest members of the group, aged ten years old, when Seamer recruited her during his visit to Ratana Pa in 1928. Seamer taught Hinerangi her perfect, educated English: “Mr Seamer took it upon himself to educate me. He used to spend a little bit of time with me each day,” she said. “It was horrible,” remembered Hinerangi in 2002, “because I couldn’t speak English… I liked sugar in my tea and I had to ask for it in English.” Undoubtedly English lessons combined with practicing it formally on stage for English-speaking audiences cultivated a degree of fluency for the choir members during their touring years.

Moving from town to city was made easier by travelling in a nine-seated Hudson van. The van was originally bought by the Home Mission Department for the Literature and Colporteur Society, but was appropriated by the MHMP in order to transport the choir members across long distances. They would load all their

---

instruments, luggage, and staging and props, as well as the choir members into the van. They were recognisable whenever they drove into towns and cities in “Huddy,” with their title emblazoned on the side of the van for all to see. “We grew to love Huddy,” as Mori Pickering and the others called her. “She represented something tangible that belonged to us in our never ending travels living in suitcases and travelling practically every day of the year.”

An important consequence of the Maori deputations was to bring young Maori members, for the first time in their life for many of them, into European homes. The choir members were usually billeted within local families in each circuit. Billeting brought the choir members into close contact with local residents of the communities they visited. In sharing food and hosting the members as guests, people who did not typically interact with Maori were opened to the culture. For the most part the choir members found billeting to be a rewarding and enjoyable experience, with many friends made along the way. There was “the odd occasion that we patiently awaited the sound of Huddy’s horn,” presumably, what Pickering infers is that not all hosts were affable or perhaps understanding. The stage then, created a space for Maori to enter not only Pakeha churches but also homes, and, as one commentator wrote, the choirs “were a mutual blessing in removing many hurtful stereotypes in the minds of both peoples.”

The MHMP and their performances were successful in supporting financial endeavours within the Home and Maori Mission Departments. The choir answered Seamer’s need to assist the missionaries and the Circuits reach their annual targets for monetary contributions towards the Home Mission Fund. During a performance interval, the object of the choir’s visit was highlighted by one of the Maori elders. First they would speak in Maori, which would be translated by Reverend Seamer or an older choir member. They would ask the audience to donate whatever they could to the Home Mission Fund in order to continue the progress already being made among the Maori people. A monetary donation was required for entry to most performances. Photographs of the choir were also sold. A portion of the takings from these

---

117 Both quotes from Pickering, “Private Collection,” 2.
120 Ibid., 6.
photographs covered the travelling expenses and the rest went to the church.\textsuperscript{121} Sometimes the choir members made and sold toffee “to swell the circuit funds.”\textsuperscript{122} By fundraising in this manner, the choir assisted each circuit in reaching its target contribution for the Home and Maori Mission Departments.

Seamer used some of the funding generated by the MHMP to subsidise and develop Maori education schemes. A portion of the money raised during the choirs’ tours in the 1920s was used to help support pupils at numerous colleges around the country, as well as one pupil at the School for the Deaf and Dumb at Sumner, in Christchurch.\textsuperscript{123} A new School of Domestic Science for Maori Girls was opened at Te Kuiti in 1929, which gave Maori girls grounding in cooking, home craft, dress making, gardening and general European management techniques.\textsuperscript{124}

Maori schools were designed to instil the Christian faith among Maori through Westernisation of habits and culture. One pamphlet showed members of the Methodist Home Mission Party as examples of the success of these schools for Maori girls. “Hundreds of Maori girls in our Methodist districts,” such as choir members Rangiøeka Moeura and Airini Grennell who were pictured in the pamphlet, “are keenly watching for their turn at the school.”\textsuperscript{125} Methodists, like other denominations, were keen to assist with Maori education and provided opportunities for young Maori. Christian sentiment, aroused by statements such as “It is a God-Inspired Scheme,” worked to enhance financial contributions for the schools throughout their tours.\textsuperscript{126} Seamer believed that Maori Christianisation and Maori education were inseparable; growth in one area meant better results in the other.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[121] Ibid., 3.
\item[122] Ibid., 4.
\item[123] Ibid., 2.
\item[124] “Rene’s Story,” in MS 524: 155/1, 34 (Christchurch: MCNZA).
\item[125] Irene Hobbs, H 216: 1 Miscellaneous (Auckland: MCNZA).
\item[126] Pickering, “Reminiscences on the Waiata Choir as related to Ruth Fry.”
\end{footnotes}
Conclusion

The origins of the MHMP lay in the development of Methodism in New Zealand – from its arrival in 1822, right up until 1924 when the party was established. Methodism used music for salvation among Maori in New Zealand from the outset of mission work in the early nineteenth century. While music was an important factor for mission work, it was clearly not the only one. The similarity of Maori musical traditions to Methodist styles perhaps enabled conversion among Maori and provided a cultural meeting point for Maori and Pakeha cultures.

Individual missionaries and ministers played important roles in developing the musical culture within the Methodist Church. I have focused on one Methodist missionary in this chapter – Reverend Seamer – whose musical talents, experiences and beliefs in racial interaction aligned with his missionary work among Maori. His musical skills, which were fostered as a child, reached full expression in his decision to establish the MHMP. Seamer responded to pressures in his work as General Superintendent of both the Home and Maori Mission Departments by effectively combining performance traditions of the Methodist Church with aspects of Maori culture and successfully displayed his vision for the wider New Zealand community. Seamer gave expression to his bicultural vision for New Zealand, one that demonstrated that the stage could be successfully used to foster interaction not only between different Maori tribal representatives, but also between Maori and Pakeha by performing together, practicing religion together and living together as a nation of two people.
CHAPTER THREE

The Methodist Home Mission Party and Live Performance in New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s

As a crowd filed in to the Otautau Town Hall in Southland, New Zealand, waiting to hear the Methodist Home Mission Party in 1932, what music and sounds did they expect to hear? When the audience had settled down, a hush fell over the expectant crowd. Then suddenly, two young choir members in traditional Maori costume walked from the side of the stage to the front with four local residents. There would have been confusion as to why the locals were with the young man and woman. Next, a rustle was heard from the back of the hall. The rest of the performers stood at the main entrance dressed in traditional Maori attire; the men were bare-chested, wearing only flax skirts and waistbands. Behind the men were the women, who wore flax skirts, intricately patterned belts, and camisoles. Their black hair was long and loose, adorned only by an embroidered headband with the feather of a Tui slipped in the side. Their costumes contrasted with that of the predominantly European New Zealanders in the audience.

The Maori woman on the stage began a karanga, a call of welcome, to the choir, and the Maori man enacted a wero (challenge) to the party as they began walking slowly forward and calling back in response. The sounds of this call may have been unfamiliar and chilling to an audience with the sustained call gliding between vocal tones. Examined by the hosts, the choir was deemed friendly and they moved to the front of the hall where they sat on the whariki (mat) during an exchange of welcome and greeting. This ritual of welcome, known as a powhiri, was concluded with the two choir representatives and the hosts on the stage carrying out hongi (or touching of the noses) with the visitors. Following this greeting, the more familiar sound of the Lord’s Prayer was collectively recited in English and then by a performance of several English psalms from the Methodist Hymn Book, including Sanctus. During the two hours of the concert, the choir performed Maori songs and

---

1 Memories of Mori Pickering, Out of the Silence: Women’s Stories, 9320 Methodist Women’s Fellowship National Executive Records (Christchurch: Methodist Church of New Zealand Archives), 5.
dances as well as alternating between popular music, religious songs, classical music, and instrumental music. At the close of the concert, the performers sang *Te Arawa*, a song that has been considered a Maori national hymn.²

A major question underpinning this chapter is what musical elements were typical and mainstream to an audience in New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s? This live performance in Otautau was typical for the Methodist Home Mission Party as they toured throughout New Zealand, yet was it normal for the period? The MHMP existed in a historical context where live performance was an important feature in most communities throughout New Zealand. Although the MHMP was technically a Methodist choir who performed religious hymns, they also performed a variety of genres of music. An investigation of the MHMP’s repertoire reveals the hybridisation and multiple influences at play in the musical traditions in New Zealand.

In order to create some coherency to the choir’s repertoire, I will organise the performance traditions of the MHMP in several musical genres, including religious traditions; indigenous performance traditions; diverse music cultures, such as classical and operatic styles, instrumentalists and patriotic songs; and imported traditions, including gospel choirs and jazz music. By separating the repertoire it is easier to delineate where the MHMP aligned with and diverged from the mainstream musical traditions of New Zealand. The influence of radio technology also impacted on the nature of performing and listening in New Zealand. At the core of this chapter however is the belief that live performance was fundamental for bringing communities together. Thus the MHMP were a notable expression of their religion and indigenous culture within communities as they toured through depression-affected New Zealand.

---

Religion and Music

I draw attention firstly to the MHMP’s performance of religious music. Music was one of the touchstones of most Christian denominations, whether it was the metrical psalms of Presbyterians, the Gregorian chant of Catholics, or the hymnody of Luther and the Wesleys.3 “All human societies use music in the course of religious worship,” writes ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl. “It has been adopted everywhere to unify cultures, to confront other cultures, and to communicate with the supernatural.”4 Similarly, Clifford Geertz commented that hymnody supplies a major ingredient in religion as an extensive cultural system. Geertz writes, “hymnody may be considered a medium of evangelical culture, a complex symbolic form comprised of poems and music, physical acts and psychological effects, texts and techniques, group behaviour and ritual gesture that expresses virtually the entire range of religious meanings available to participants in evangelical religion.”5

The religious affiliations of European New Zealanders are outlined in the 1926 census. From a total European population of 1,344,469, the Church of England claimed 41.2 per cent, which positioned it as the church with most social influence and also as the default category for nominal Christians.6 Presbyterians were the second largest group (24.6 per cent), followed by Roman Catholics with roughly half as many adherents (12.9 per cent). New Zealand Methodists consisted of nine per cent of the total population (or 121,212 individuals).7 With the majority of New Zealanders following some form of religion in the mid-1920s, it is plausible to expect that most would have been familiar with the musical traditions of their denomination.

---

6 Protestants (other) encapsulates Baptists, Unitarians, Lutherans, and Quakers. Note that the total New Zealand population figure does not include the Maori population in 1926, which totalled 63,670 in the 1926 Census: Census New Zealand, Census and Statistics, 1936 (Wellington: E. V. Paul, Government Printer, 1937), v.
7 The Methodist percentage includes Wesleyan Methodists and Primitive Methodists: Census New Zealand, v.
For most denominations religious music was part of many New Zealanders’ experience of worship. Worshippers sang in church choirs, during church services and at the close of sermons. In some denominations music instruction was nurtured through local church choirs and opportunities for leadership came in the form of choir directorship and leading congregations in hymn singing. The Wesley Church Choir on Taranaki Street, Wellington, was a long lasting testament to choral singing in the Methodist Church, with the choir spanning from the early twentieth century until the 1960s. Organ music, piano and instrumental music also characterised certain denominational services. Regardless which denomination New Zealanders adhered to, performance and music was inevitably a major part of people’s religious experience.

The MHMP indicate one part of the religious performance culture in New Zealand: Methodism. The MHMP typically performed in church services to provide entertainment and accompaniment as they travelled with Reverend Seamer on his annual visits around Methodist circuits. Some audiences did not adhere to Methodism,

---

yet the choir and Seamer encouraged all to attend their performances. The repertoire performed by the choir was usually taken from an edition of *The Methodist Hymn Book*. The hymnbook most likely used by the MHMP was the combined prayer book and hymnal of 1927, *The Methodist Church: Ko te Pukapuka o nga Inoi me era atu Tikanga a te Hahi Metoriti*.\(^{11}\) The MHMP regularly performed the Doxology and the Lord’s Prayer, both prayers typically chanted by congregations at the beginning and end of a sermon (and not only in Methodism). They also performed psalms such as *O Heavenly King* (12) and *O God of Bethel* (95), which focus on pilgrimage and salvation.\(^{12}\) The MHMP performed various hymns, including *Lord of all being* (23), and *Jesus, the First and Last* (121), the text of which said, “Jesus, the First and Last/ On thee my soul is cast: Thou didst Thy work begin/ By blotting out my sin; Thou wilt the root remove/ And perfect me in love.”\(^{13}\) One reporter in Lower Hutt, near Wellington noted in 1931 that the choir’s chanting of hymns was when “the Maoris seem at home, and the harmonies and the spirit in which it is done, is indeed stirring to the listener.”\(^{14}\)

While hymn and psalm singing was commonplace throughout New Zealand, so too was the development of a purely Maori experience of Christian hymnody. The MHMP often adapted Christian music by altering the language into Maori, or by replacing the hymn tune with a traditional Maori one and retaining the poem. For example, one reviewer wrote that the MHMP performed an English hymn “in the native tongue.” They went on to say that the hymn was “one of the first known to the race,” and when interpreted, was *Jesus, Son of Peace*.\(^{15}\) At other times, the MHMP performed and confirmed already adapted tunes. The hymn *E Ihu, e te Kingi nui* was adapted as early as 1848 to the British tune of *Rule Britannia*, which featured

---

\(^{11}\) *The Methodist Church Ko te Pukapuka o nga Inoi me era atu Tikanga a te Hahi Metoriti (Weteriana) nga Himene me nga Hakamareta me era atu Ritenga Hoki o te Hahi* (Ranana, 1927). They may also have used the edition by Sir Frederick Bridge (ed.), *The Methodist Hymn-Book with Tunes* (London: Novello and Co, Limited Printers, 1901).

\(^{12}\) Bridge, *The Methodist Hymn Book with tunes*.

\(^{13}\) “Maori Choir,” *Hutt News* (28 October 1931), 2; and “Maori Concert,” *Ellesmere Guardian* (1 March 1932), 5.


\(^{15}\) “Maori Concert,” *Ellesmere Guardian* (1 March 1932), 5.
regularly in their religious repertoire. At other times they performed a hymn written by a Maori chief in his own scale, and also a lively version of *Abide with Me.*

As Maori “embraced the Christian belief system,” wrote Amy Stillman, this system was “synthesised in fundamental ways, including the absorption of English hymn repertory and choral performance practice,” and consequentially musical materials were reformulated according to their own musical practices. The emergent indigenised Christian musical idiom, with origins predominantly from Protestant denominations was apparent in New Zealand in the early twentieth century, and such hybridised music came to be accepted as indigenous.

**Maori Performance and Culture**

While Maori may have experienced religious hymnody in a variety of ways, European New Zealanders relied on travelling performing groups to bring Maori culture to them. Europeans established cities and urban centres throughout New Zealand, whereas most Maori chose to remain in tribal formation in rural environments. An article in the *New Zealand Methodist Times* commented:

> Although travel is always recognised as one of the most important forms of education, it is difficult for Europeans to realise what a great boon for travelling and contact with European Christians in their homes and Churches is to our young Maori people. In their own settlements, unfortunately, they seldom have much contact with the better type of Europeans.

In 1936 eighty three per cent of the total Maori population of New Zealand lived rurally, while the other seventeen per cent lived in urban areas. Most Pakeha therefore, did not interact with Maori on a daily basis (and some not at all). A consequence of such demographic separation was that differences emerged between

---

rural and urban Maori. The MHMP members threw this difference into stark relief; they were educated and well travelled, compared with rural Maori who were typically less educated.

Although “the two races came to live in largely separate worlds,” the lack of interaction between Maori and Pakeha appears to have triggered a Maori performance market in New Zealand. Different Maori groups found that value was attached to their performances to European audiences and many could achieve their religious, political or economic objectives. A minor tradition of touring religious Maori choirs was established in the early twentieth century. For example, in 1908 the Rotorua Maori Mission Entertainers performed throughout Rotorua district and for important guests such as the Duke and Duchess of York (who would later become King George VI and Queen Mary). The Reverend Frederick A. Bennett (1871-1950), who in 1928 became the first Anglican Bishop of New Zealand, led this group of Maori performers. The RMME performed haka, poi, popular European tunes set to Maori lyrics, and American plantation songs. They also performed popular New Zealand songs including Home, Little Maori Home and The Old Folks at Home.

The Mormon Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints established its mission school in Hastings in 1913 and quickly formed a choral group. Two years later the music department at the Maori Agricultural College (MAC) featured a band, a choir and a glee club. They toured through Manawatu, Taranaki, King Country, Bay of Plenty, Auckland and Northland. Historian John Thomson notes that this was probably the first time that many Maori in the audience had seen Maori instrumentalists in a band, and realised that this was an attainable goal. Another group shared what Thomson describes as “choral glory,” when the Ohinemutu Rotorua Maori Choir was founded in the late 1920s. This group also provides an example of vocal transition from the melismatic waiata singing to Western choral techniques.

---

22 Bennett and the RMME is the subject of current investigation by Marianne Schultz at the University of Auckland.
23 McLean argues that Bennett’s early troupe were predecessors of the Rotorua Maori Choir, which became a lasting performing troupe for numerous decades. McLean, Maori Music, 326.
25 Ibid., 4.
Politics and religion were closely linked for some Maori performers. In 1923, the Ratana Church established a brass band and choir. The Church increasingly took a political dimension, using music to reinforce their agenda to “defend the basic human rights of Maori.” During his world tour from April to December of 1924, Ratana took his brass band and choir to petition King George V and the British Parliament for a resolution of Maori land grievances. These travelling representatives dressed in what became the distinctive purple, white and gold uniforms of the Ratana movement. Although their petition was rejected, they took the opportunity to perform for British audiences while on tour. The Ratana movement later became “a significant political force” within New Zealand, and by 1943, Labour-Ratana Members of Parliament dominated the four Maori seats in Parliament. David Hebert further notes that by 1936, fully twenty per cent of Maori identified themselves as members of the Ratana faith, making it a significant religious and political force in New Zealand.

While politics and religion were motivations to perform, some of these early Maori groups were driven by economic objectives, which developed hand in hand with tourism. For example, in Rotorua the Hinemoa Maori Entertainers were a group who performed indigenous culture under the management of the Guides, known only

26 The *United Maori Welfare League of the Northern, Southern and Chatham Islands* included football, haka and poi dancing teams, and Ratana ministers were appointed and sent to travel the country to seek converts. The Ngati Maniapoto and Ngati Whatua tribes built two Ratana Churches in this period. Moana Raurete, “The Origins of the Ratana Movement,” in *Tihe Mauriora: Aspects of Maoritanga*, ed. Michael King (Methuen, 1978), 42-66.


28 The tour group consisted of 23 men and 16 women, most of whom were musicians in either the brass band or the Maori performance troupe: Hebert, “Music Transculturation and Identity,” 180.


as Eileen and Georgina. They performed Maori music to those visitors who came to the region for the thermal reserves. Their programmes consisted of love ditties, poi songs including the canoe poi, men and women’s haka and the popular Alfred Hill song, *Waiata Poi.* The performance of Maori culture was part of the growing tourism industry throughout Rotorua. Money provided an incentive to perform and was a way for Maori groups to capitalise on the popularity of Maori music. Most of these indigenous groups maintained tribal integrity, only including performers from one tribe, in this case the Te Arawa tribe.

The charismatic and powerful leader of the Waikato, Te Puea Herangi (1884-1952), established a travelling Maori choir, *Te Pou o Mangatawhiri* (TPM) in 1922 to raise funds for the building of the meetinghouse Mahinarangi at Turangawaewae. Te Puea was inspired to establish the touring group after she saw a Pacific Island group performing at Turangawaewae. TPM was a troupe of forty-four performers whose initial concerts were given at Ngaruawahia and Tuakau in December 1922. In 1923 TPM undertook its first large tour, with the members walking vast distances around the North Island, performing in the Waikato, Auckland, the Kaipara district and Northland, until reportedly, the soles of their shoes were worn off. When Seamer established the MHMP in 1924, the stage was well prepared for their acceptance and positive reception.

Whatever the reason for performing, Maori troupes found benefits in New Zealand as audiences were intrigued by Maori culture and music. While numerous other Maori groups performed for similar ends, some people have praised Seamer’s Methodist group for their ability to fit in with the people they performed to. “In the Waikato,” Donna Awatere commented, “the Methodists were especially successful because they did not attempt to reform Maori values, but were prepared to adapt church ritual to suit Maori tastes.” Their adaptation was exemplified by their digression from religious repertoire to the inclusion of Maori culture. In the opening act of most performances, the members typically enacted traditional musical and cultural rituals such as the powhiri. The powhiri is very important in Maori society.

---

36 Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty* (Auckland: Broadsheet Magazine Ltd, 1984), 84,
and governs each stage of the reception of visiting groups (manuhiri) to a marae or meeting place by the local tribes (tangata whenua). At the beginning of the ceremony, the visitors (the main body of the choir) were treated as potentially hostile by the welcoming hosts and the two groups stayed spatially apart from each other. Until the formalities were over, the visitors were considered outsiders to the community and were known as waewae tapu (people with sacred feet). The object of the ritual was to decontaminate the visitors and to welcome them. The powhiri gave audiences a glimpse of traditional Maori life and meant they could engage with Maori tradition and be part of the ceremony, even only as spectators. The ritual subtly changed the balance between the audience and the performers. Both were locked in a process of giving and taking – the performers gave their hosts a presentation of their culture, while the audience took with them education, music, and some understanding of Maori culture.

The MHMP typically performed waiata, or songs composed by Maori. As explained previously, most waiata were sung to narrate a story of love, farewell, heartbreak and many other emotions. There are thirty-four distinguishable waiata, as defined by Mervyn McLean, each represent a different emotion or event. The MHMP performed waiata such as Te Akoako to Rangi, Hine e Hine, Ka Taka Mai Awhi Mai, and Aue e Te Iwi. A comparatively contemporary waiata performed by the MHMP was E Te Arawa Tirohia Ra, published in the newspaper called the New Zealand Pictorial News on 1 September 1928, which Hemi Piripata (who went by the alias Jim Philpotts) arranged and composed.

Another waiata performed by the MHMP was E Pari Ra. This song has several histories attached to it. A footnote in the musical score of the Begg's Famous Maori Songs, 1926, notes that a young Hawkes Bay chief composed the song in 1824. The story refers to the incident when Ngapuhi and Uruwera warriors overran Titirangi Pa, and the chief's lover was carried off into slavery. While this may be the origin for the song, another version, most likely adapted for the purpose, suggests that E Pari Ra was composed by Pairaire Tomoana and dedicated to Whakatomo Ellison, of

---

38 McLean, Maori Music, 110-1.
40 Famous Maori Songs, (Charles Begg & Co. Ltd, 1926).
Hastings, who was killed in France during World War One.\textsuperscript{41} The song became synonymous with the efforts of the Maori soldiers at war. Much later the Ngati Kahungunu tribe used the song at the opening of Mahinarangi meetinghouse at Ngaruawahia in March 1929.\textsuperscript{42} The different meanings that this one song took exemplify the dynamic and changeable nature of waiata and also the ways that Maori songs could be reinvented at each performance.

The MHMP often demonstrated native poi dances for their Western audiences, which were considered an intriguing spectacle. The poi dance supposedly dates from pre-European times, but there are no references to it in early literature.\textsuperscript{43} While the haka has counterparts in other areas of Polynesia, the poi dance is unique to New Zealand.\textsuperscript{44} Ethnomusicologist Alan Armstrong argues that the long poi (with a string about the length of an arm) was the original form, but because only girls of high birth were permitted to dance with it, the lower classes invented the short poi (about twenty-two centimetres long).\textsuperscript{45} The poi is typically accompanied by a rhythmic chant, an adapted version of a waiata, or to a Western-style tune in 2/4, 3/4, or 4/4 (common times in Western music genres).\textsuperscript{46} Eldon Best gives a 1901 account of poi:

The poi dance is performed by females. Each performer has a small, light ball made of leaves of the raupo tightly rolled, and having a string attached to it… The players hold the string, and, timing each movement to the poi song, twirl the light balls in many directions – now in front of the body, now over the right shoulder, then the left, etc…\textsuperscript{47}

Methodist Home Mission Party women interchanged between short and long poi action songs and dances for their audiences during their performances. An early mention of poi songs was made in 1925, with a programme noting that their concert

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{41} McLean, \textit{Maori Music}, 319.
    \item \textsuperscript{42} Ngamoni Huata, \textit{The Rhythm and Life of Poi} (Harper Collins New Zealand, 2000).
    \item \textsuperscript{43} Suzanne Youngerman, “Maori Dancing since the Eighteenth Century,” \textit{Ethnomusicology}, vol. 18, no. 1 (1974), 94.
    \item \textsuperscript{44} Alan Armstrong, \textit{Maori Games and Hakas} (Wellington: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1964), 83.
    \item \textsuperscript{45} Armstrong, \textit{Maori Games and Hakas}, 83.
    \item \textsuperscript{46} Youngerman, “Maori Dancing since the Eighteenth Century,” 94.
\end{itemize}
“includes a number of items peculiar to the Native Race, including waiatas, pois and Maori songs.”

The MHMP included a greater number of poi dances by the 1930s when “six different poi dances were given” at one performance in Southland in 1932.

The choir sometimes performed *Uia Mai Koia*, which was a seated canoe display. Such canoe poi dances are very interesting for audiences due to the difficult rhythm and the simulation of the sounds of waves hitting an imaginary canoe by the clacking together of poi balls.

In the photograph below the choir perform a kneeling poi dance with short poi. The detailed painting in the background depicts what is presumably New Zealand foliage and forest with large ferns bordering the picture. To create depth, a ragged canyon sweeps off in the distance, clearly designed to transport the audience away from their everyday lives and into a world of nature and mystery.

---

48 *Evening Post* (20 August 1925), 10.
51 Youngerman, “Maori Dancing since the Eighteenth Century,” 94.
The haka was another indigenous tradition that was typically performed by the MHMP. There are numerous historical references to haka, for example during the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York (later King George V and Queen Mary) in 1901. The large-scale reception for them at Rotorua included five thousand Maori and numerous haka were performed in their honour. The MHMP usually performed haka such as Pakia Kia Rite and Ka Mate (which were particularly well-known in New Zealand). The MHMP typically used haka to end their performances in a climactic fashion.

As most accounts of the choirs’ performances do not detail the effects that the haka had on audiences, we must rely on some general characteristics of haka to understand what audiences were likely to have witnessed. McLean notes that characteristics of haka include the use of foot stamping, the use of body percussion, including thigh slapping and chest beating, quivering or trembling the hands (kakapa), the simultaneity of movement, and precision of time keeping. Haka traditionally “inspires courage, and indomitable hatred toward to enemy, whose nerves in return are supposed to be contrarily affected.” Just as the poi is symbolic of female Maori culture, the same function is assumed by the haka, the war dance of Maori men. Men traditionally perform haka while women support from behind the line of men. The haka represented more than any other form of dance the cultural manifestation of Maori as a fearsome warrior, a dominant image in the mind of Pakeha.

52 McLean, Maori Music, 334.
53 The Famous Waiata Maori Choir, Side 1.
54 McLean, Maori Music, 57-60.
55 Joel Samuel Polack, Manners and Customs of the New Zealanders, second edition (London: Madden, 1840), 2-4.
During the twentieth century Western-styled Maori songs came to prominence. Such songs and music involved using Maori lyrics and poems with Western-styled music and they became favourites of performing groups and audiences alike. Waltz songs were fashioned to Maori poems, such as *Beneath the Maori Moon.* Like many others, MHMP members gave regular performances of a number of songs by Alfred Hill. Hill was a New Zealand composer, trained in Western art music but who chose Maori culture as the theme for many of his compositions. Hill’s reputation was established by his setting of the Maori legend of *Hinemoa,* first performed in 1897. His songs like *Waiata Poi* (composed, it is said, for colouratura soprano Rosina Buckman), *Waiata Maori, Home, Little Maori, Home,*

---

57 Walter Smith, *Beneath the Maori Moon* (Wellington: Sheet Music Archive of New Zealand).
58 Rosina Buckman was born in Blenheim, New Zealand, on 16 March 1881, and became a noted coloratura soprano in England. Peter Downes. “Buckman, Rosina – Biography”, from the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the*
and *Tangi*, enjoyed wide popularity.\(^59\) In particular, *Waiata Poi* was used in many singers’ records and performances, including the RMME and Princess Iwa, a famous Maori singer who performed throughout England.\(^60\) *Waiata Poi* paints a romantic image of a skilled Maori maiden, who is “famed for poi play.”\(^61\) Hill was one of a few composers who consciously developed a “Maori sound” which was popularised by groups like the MHMP.


---


\(^60\) Princess Iwa performed this song among many others during her tour of England in 1916. “One of the features of attraction was the Maori song ‘Waiata Poi,’ sung by Princess Iwa, attired in picturesque Maori costume.” “Music in the Provinces,” *The Musical Times* (1 January 1916), 32.

The regular performance of such Westernised music by Maori performers served to establish what Native American historian Phillip Deloria, calls “a shared cultural memory” of indigenous people. Deloria argues that the simplified rhythmic sounds of the Indian drum, “dum, dah dah, dum,” and the hollering call often used by Western composers became synonymous with Indian culture, and “Indian sounds signified expectations of primitivism and social evolution.” Similarly, I argue that Westernised Maori music simplified Maori culture into exaggerated characteristics to foster a shared memory. A generation of New Zealanders learned to love the romantic image of Maori, full of imagery regarding nature and love:

Oh, little Maori maiden why should we mourn apart when calm and pure the moonlight draws heart so close to heart? Then come, my little Maori to your fond lover, and in this heart of Kauri your heart shall find a home.

Hill romanticised Maori culture through song and performance. Music was one vehicle by which composers turned legends about Maori into a broader New Zealand culture. Westernised Maori music created memories of things that audiences were not able to experience, such as the Maori migration from the legendary Hawaiki to New Zealand or the dynamics of a traditional Maori village. When the MHMP and numerous other groups performed these sounds of Maori, they confirmed the romantic notions of Maori culture.

A Diverse Musical Culture

The Methodist Home Mission Party was part of an ever-changing musical cycle in New Zealand. The choir were highly creative in their performances of popular tunes and melodies and they regularly performed famous English songs such as Annie Laurie and Danny Boy. Simple Simon, a popular eighteenth century English rhyme, was another English contemporary song performed by the MHMP either in Maori or in English. The simple rhyming verse is illustrated the poem:

64 “Maori Choir,” Hutt News (28 October 1931), 2; “Maori Concert,” Ellesmere Guardian (1 March 1932), 5.
Simple Simon met a pieman,
Going to the fair;
Says Simple Simon to the pieman,
Let me taste your ware.
Says the pieman to Simple Simon,
Show me first your penny;
Says Simple Simon to the pieman,
Indeed I have not any.\(^{65}\)

The MHMP performed English tunes in different languages and musical forms for comedic effect. Sometimes the choir sang in English the song *Our Fathers Crossed the Ocean*, to the tune of a German song, *Farwohl, mein teures Lieb*.\(^{66}\) Some of the German repertoire performed by the MHMP may attest to the German repertoire of the Methodist hymnbooks, but may also be a throwback to the German presence in Taranaki in the 1860s.\(^{67}\) The MHMP also performed English, Scottish, Welsh, and French airs such as *Marseillaise* in Maori. Much amusement was created when they performed a eulogy to Australians in Maori to the tune of *Three Blind Mice*.\(^{68}\) Musical creativity and surprising musical effects were part of the choir’s repertoire, which created interest and variation for audiences.

The MHMP illuminates another aspect of live performance traditions in New Zealand, Western Classical traditions. The word “Classical” has become routinely used as shorthand for written European and North American music, which has, writes Andrew Blake, “been associated since the eighteenth century with a tradition of writing and concert performance.”\(^{69}\) Western Classical music consists of operatic, instrumental, ballad and air traditions. A number of international performers came to New Zealand in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Emma Albani, who was renowned for her interpretation of Italian opera. Albani reportedly took

---

\(^{67}\) A mission station was established at Warea by the Reformed German Lutheran missionary, Johann Friedrich Riemenschneider, otherwise known as Rimene to the Maori who lived there (including Te Whiti): James N. Bade, “Germans - Contribution to New Zealand life: 1800s,” *Te Ara - the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/germans/2 (accessed 20 February 2012).
some of Alfred Hill’s songs into her repertoire, including *The Maori Canoe* and *Waiata Poi.*

New Zealand choral societies became pivotal to the colonial music scene in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Based on the English choral tradition, the societies that formed drew hundreds of untrained singers throughout New Zealand who performed Bach, Handel, Mendelssohn, Beethoven and other famous Classical and Romantic composers. Musical and operatic societies in Auckland (1855), Wellington (1860), Christchurch (1860), and Dunedin (1863), among others throughout the country provide further evidence that a lively tradition of choral performance existed. Urban centres were typically the foci of Western Classical tradition and rural locations tended not to receive regular visitors of “high standard.” Some contemporary commentators wrote that the drawback of country life is “that if one has a longing for classical music of the highest order one generally has to go to the large centres to have the hunger appeased.”

Diversity characterised the Western Classical music scene in New Zealand. While European New Zealanders enjoyed, were employed in, and performed in these classical genres, a significant number of Maori also performed classical and operatic genres, with some making a name on the international stage. Fanny Howie (1868-1916) was a contralto better known under her stage name of Princess Te Rangi Pai. She is thought to have composed the famous Maori waiata *Hine E Hine.*

Eva Skerrett (1890-1947) was born on Stewart Island and brought up in Bluff and began singing at an early age. Billed as “the Maori Nightingale,” she too had a successful career in England performing classical music and Maori waiata. Skerrett also used an epithet for the stage, Princess Iwa, while performing to Western audiences, presumably to contrast to other singers and to add a hint of royalty to her presence.

---

71 Ibid., 91.
72 Ibid.
74 After marrying civil servant John Howie in Christchurch on 15 October 1891, Howie studied singing in Australia and is said to have toured there in 1898 before returning to New Zealand. In December 1900 she departed for England to study with the baritone Charles Santley. She embarked on concert, oratorio and ballad training and with a vocal range from mezzo-soprano to contralto she could reportedly handle many styles. She gave her début performance in Liverpool in late 1901, and was highly praised by the critics: McLean, *Maori Music*, 317.
Both of these women were of mixed racial descent with Anglicised names, but interestingly, took Maori stage names in order to inhabit a unique place on the international stage.

MHMP members occasionally performed in the Western classical style. A number of the choir members were classically trained singers. Like Princess Iwa, Airini Grennell was referred to as “the Chatham Islands Nightingale” and was considered by many as the leading soprano of the choir. Grennell gave beautiful renditions of Tosti’s Goodbye, Dudley Buck’s Fear ye not, O Israel, and of Charles Gounod’s aria O Lord, Thy Redeemer and was reportedly recalled to perform four or

---

five times in an evening! Grennell had classical training, held a Diploma of Licentiateship for musicianship and was also an accomplished pianist.77

The bass voice of another choir member, Inia Te Wiata, caught the attention of many and his voice was said to be remarkable for clarity and diction, depth and purity of tone.78 Te Wiata joined Seamer’s choir in 1932 and remained with them until the end of 1935, when he left to pursue traditional Maori carving training at Ngaruawahia. Te Wiata later had a successful operatic career at Covent Garden, London in the 1950s.79 In performing classical music, Maori performers like Grennell and Te Wiata challenged expectations of what traditional Maori should sound like, proving that some Maori could cross the boundaries between Western and indigenous musical styles. The MHMP also provided rural communities the opportunity to listen to music in the Western Classical tradition, which was particularly significant for those areas with limited access to gramophones and radios.

The MHMP illuminates yet another musical influence in New Zealand, that of instrumental performance. Instrumental performances were popular throughout New Zealand, with musicians visiting to great acclaim, such as the European violinist Yoyanovitch Bratza.80 Many photographs of the choir show them posed behind or holding musical instruments. These instruments included the ukulele, acoustic and steel guitars, and violins, with some audiences remarking, “The visitors proved to be expert players of the steel and Spanish guitars, all these numbers being accorded hearty applause.”81 Although never displayed, the choir members were sometimes accompanied by a piano depending on whether the venues provided one. The use of ukulele and steel guitar indicates Hawaiian musical influence, from where the ukulele

76 NZMT (18 October 1930), 3. “Soprano Singers the Star,” Barrier Miner (7 June 1935), 2; and “Maoris Please Large Audience,” Barrier Miner (8 June 1935), 3.
78 “Maoris Please Large Audience,” Barrier Miner (8 June 1935), 3.
80 The Evening Post (5 July 1924), 21.
81 “Rev. Seamer’s Maori Choir,” The Otautau Standard and Wallace County Chronicle (5 April 1932), 2.
originates. Souvenir photographs sold by the choir depicting instruments served to emphasise their use (see below Image 5).

Image 5: Methodist Home Mission Party, 1924. Displayed at the front of the photograph are an acoustic guitar, violin, ukulele and steel guitar, signalling the hybridisation of traditional Maori performance with Western musical performance traditions.

The First World War impacted on musical tastes. New Zealand performers, musicians, composers and communities actively sought to promote patriotism and be part of the wartime spirit both during and after the war. This patriotism was audible in the proliferation of jingoistic songs and the large number of public concerts taking place throughout New Zealand.\(^{82}\) New Zealand born songwriters rode the wave of patriotism and tried to create song hits that expressed loyalty to the cause and support of the troops. Among the dozens of songs published during this period were *The Call of the Fernleaf*, *Good Old New Zealand*, *Sons of New Zealand*, and *The New Zealand Marseillaise*. The MHMP performed these patriotic songs to commemorate those who went to war, including *The Soldier’s Farewell*,\(^ {83}\) particularly during the Anzac

---

ceremonies each year. Many wartime songs had nostalgic importance for those who lived through the period and the years following. Performances of such music had the effect of bringing people together to remember those days.

Illustration 4: The New Marsellaise, New Zealand Sheet Music Archive, Wellington.

Imported Musical Influences in New Zealand

Just as patriotic music diversified the music spectrum, the introduction of “black” performances introduced layers of racial complexity to the live performance traditions in New Zealand. As early as 1874, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were an American concert group of American ex-slaves and the sons and daughters of slaves, who introduced spirituals to New Zealand, even managing to visit during World War

84 “The Happy Maori,” Ellesmere Guardian (18 April 1933), 8; “Anzac Day Celebrations to be Broadcast,” The Advertiser (20 April 1935), 7; and “Anzac Day,” Gippsland Times (26 April 1937), 1.
One. This group spent a season at the Auckland Town Hall’s concert chamber. The *New Zealand Herald* noted that they performed “coon songs that are almost classical, and operatic excerpts.” The reviewer went on to write that the Fisk Jubilee Singers were “an entertainment that has seldom been surpassed.”

American performers directly introduced spiritual and plantation songs to New Zealand, the music staying long after the performers had gone. The MHMP and others, including Te Puea’s troupe increasingly performed Negro spirituals in the 1920s and 1930s. Unfortunately many of the written records do not note what these spirituals were, only that they performed “a Negro spiritual,” a “piccaninny,” or “a plantation song.”

We might speculate that the MHMP performed popular contemporary songs such as *Ma Curly Headed Babby* or *The Piccaninnies*, the lyrics of which refer to interracial relations: “We’re the real Piccaninnies only found in Ohio, some folk think dat we are all black, but dat’s not so, you look about and you will find out, we are all brown in Ohio.” Such songs had popular currency on the stage and were enjoyed by many New Zealanders, which is evidenced by the sheet music collection of Negro spirituals in the Sheet Music Archive of New Zealand in Wellington.

A new live instrumental performance tradition called “jazz” was imported to New Zealand in the 1920s. What was publicised as “jazz music” in its earliest appearances, Chris Bourke notes was “likely to have been a dance band made up of instruments that were not usually played together, with startling percussion effects.”

To musicians and their audiences the most distinguishable feature of jazz would have been rhythm. Jazz was “aggressive and disordered,” wrote historian Bruce Johnson. Much of the jazz music arrived in New Zealand on short-wave radio from the West Coast of the United States and musicians gradually adopted the new style of music, thus diversifying the performance traditions in New Zealand.

A key moment in this process was the visit of the American Savoy Havana Band in late 1924, which gave New Zealand its first extended demonstration of jazz

---

87 “Maori Choir in Colourful Presentation,” *The Advertiser* (10 May 1935), 22
88 George Clutsam, *Ma Curly Headed Babby* and *The Piccaninnies* are both held in the Sheet Music Archive of New Zealand, Wellington.
89 Bourke, *Blue Smoke*, 7.
music. The band began its visit in Auckland on 6 December and continued through to Wellington and Christchurch in 1925.\footnote{New Zealand Herald, 3 December 1924, 5, quoted in Bourke, Blue Smoke, 22.} It is quite possible that the timing of Ralton’s visit to New Zealand may have coincided with the Methodist Home Mission Party’s maiden tour, and that they may have crossed paths, albeit as spectators. The Savoy Havana Band influenced New Zealand live performance in several ways. They contributed to New Zealand music by giving the widest exposure to live jazz, playing the latest foxtrots, medleys of Hawaiian melodies, Scottish songs and well-known plantation airs.\footnote{Bourke, Blue Smoke, 22-23.} They also encouraged a distinct New Zealand style of jazz by performing the popular foxtrot song \textit{Yaaka Hula Hickey Dula} as the \textit{Maori-Hula Medley}.\footnote{Ibid., 24.} Popular jazz styles were heard on the radio and in music halls throughout the main centres in the 1920s. While the MHMP did not necessarily perform in a jazz style, they would certainly have heard jazz on the radio and during their tours of New Zealand.

Technological developments in radio transmission impacted on the way that New Zealanders listened in the 1920s. One historian has gone so far as to describe the 1920s as the decade of radio, in which the technology transformed the New Zealand soundscape.\footnote{James Donald, “A Complex Kind of Training: Cities, Technologies and Sound in Jazz-Age Europe,” in Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity (ANU E Press, 2007), 25.} New Zealand was one of the earlier colonial outposts to establish a government-sanctioned radio company.\footnote{John Herbert Hall, The History of Broadcasting in New Zealand, 1920-1954 (Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand, 1980), 1.} Local radio stations were established in many centres throughout New Zealand. Although the first radio stations were private, from the beginning the government was involved and the Post and Telegraph Department policed the airwaves, which hitherto had been used for Morse code and ship safety.\footnote{Bourke, Blue Smoke, 27.} To own a radio was not only initially expensive but also complicated. The Radio Broadcasting Company (RBC) required the earliest radio owners to apply for a licence, supply references and a form signed by a Justice of the Peace. Consequently, in 1925 only 4702 licences were held in New Zealand.\footnote{Patrick Day, The Radio Years (Auckland University Press, 1994), 321.
Radio programmes were characterised by “cosmopolitanism” in the early radio years in New Zealand. “Radio stations,” writes James Donald, “were forced to broadcast whatever appropriate material they could lay their hands on.”\(^98\) While focusing on Europe, the same could be said of New Zealand. Historian Patrick Day notes “music became the mainstay of programming,” and that “Regulations permitted only a small proportion of recorded music” on the radio, thus broadcasters encouraged live performances.\(^99\) At first there was no disjunction between live performances and the radio and, “For some time there was a willing flood of singers, musicians and other performers keen to be on the air.”\(^100\) At first performers charged no fee, but the RBC soon found that too many performers were willing to go on air, so in 1928 it became policy that artists should be of a high quality and remunerated for their service.\(^101\) Like many other artists, the MHMP began to broadcast their performances on the radio, but not on a regular basis.\(^102\) By the 1930s, the MHMP had made lasting relationships with the National Commercial Broadcasting Service (NCBS). Colin G Scrimgeour, the Controller of the NCBS, gave the MHMP a letter of introduction for future radio broadcasting:

> I have been closely associated with the Party from a broadcasting point of view for many years, and there is always a very popular demand for their sessions whenever they are on the air.\(^103\)

The radio industry slowly changed the way that people listened to music. Music was made accessible to a much larger audience as the radio became more widespread. Acts of listening changed to what Rosenfeld describes as “acousmatic listening,” that is, the experience of listening to sounds apart from their original and visible source, which became increasingly privatised from the 1920s onward.\(^104\)

\(^98\) Donald, “A Complex Kind of Training,” 25.


\(^100\) Ibid., 63.

\(^101\) Ibid., 74-75.


\(^103\) Letter of introduction from Colin G Scrimgeour, National Commercial Broadcasting Service (16 July 1937), in Home Mission and Church Extension Collection, Maori Choir Box (Christchurch: MCNZ).

within the home at one’s leisure; a process that Caroline Daley argues “provided the musical accompaniment to New Zealand’s leisurely activities.”\textsuperscript{105} This side effect of privatised listening did not appear to reduce the attendance of live performances in the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, most New Zealand performers embraced the technology alongside live performance, viewing the radio as an opportunity to perform to a wider audience. Most communities continued to hold concerts and church services, while school productions and local community sings maintained prominence.

\textbf{Touring through New Zealand, 1929-1934}

The Methodist Home Mission Party was one group amongst the eclectic range of live performance traditions in New Zealand. Their touring schedule in the late 1920s and early 1930s was much the same as when it first began in 1924. One notable change was that the party left for Bluff and made a trip to Stewart Island to entertain and visit those communities in May 1930.\textsuperscript{106}

The MHMP continued to challenge ideas about Maori in New Zealand. Arthur Palmer, who was a young teenager in the early 1930s, remembered when the MHMP came to visit his township of Naumai on the Ruawai Flats, Northland. Palmer recalled tensions about having the Maori choir to stay, and “Lots of good church people drew the line at having Maoris to sleep in the house.” His family, however “always had several, and on one occasion I remember Chris [his brother] and I were boarded with some Anglican friends so that our beds were available also.”\textsuperscript{107} While not every family was willing to host the MHMP, it appears the choir challenged some pre-conceptions. Palmer recalled being very impressed by the demeanour of the group and the friendly way they interacted with his parents and friends.

The stage provided a space to challenge boundaries between Maori and Pakeha. There were some denominational native schools in Victorian New Zealand, which taught Maori children that to all intents and purposes they were “like Pakeha,” but of a lower subservient order. These schools fostered systematic shaping of “the collective consciousness through the stereotypic image of what was believed to

\textsuperscript{106} “H. M. Maori Party,” \textit{NZMT} (17 May 1930), 17.
\textsuperscript{107} Arthur Palmer, Private memoirs (Auckland, 2011).
constitute ‘ideal’ Maori citizenship.” Richard Beresford Nightingale writes that Maori “were taught that they would become model Maori citizens: the boys (as men) would work on the land and the girls (as women) would be homemakers and nurturers of the family.” However, the members of the MHMP offered different options for employment and Maori futures. Performance could be a different pathway for some individuals. Palmer recalled that “There was no doubt that they made a lasting impression on those who came to the concerts, and they were generally better educated and much more confident in speech and manner than most Maori in the North.”

Like many other institutions, the world economic depression impinged on the effectiveness of the Methodist Church. The need for the MHMP to collect donations and funds was more important than ever before. The depression began in 1929 and had an enormous impact on the morale and well being of communities throughout New Zealand. Evidence that communities were struggling was apparent in the Home Mission Board report on Maori work at the Methodist Conference. The report declared that the economic conditions in most areas were of great concern and that “most of our people are suffering grievous hardship through the shortage of food and clothes.” The situation for many rural Maori was particularly serious, with many communities finding themselves left with no choice but being “forced to return to rough bush foods… [which] is seriously affecting health – particularly that of the children.”

New Zealanders collectively sought entertainment to escape the challenges of daily life. Entertainment outlets used live performance to alleviate public despondency. Radio broadcasters in particular, began issuing programmes that encouraged optimism and resiliency. Radio Record, a national weekly radio supplement, hosted programmes that suggested people should find comfort through

---

108 This was not true of several schools at the time, including Te Aute College, which went to great lengths to provide Maori with opportunities for tertiary education. Former pupils include Sir Apirana Ngata and Sir Peter Buck: Richard Beresford Nightingale, “Maori at Work: the Shaping of a Maori Workforce within the New Zealand State, 1935-1975” (PhD diss., Massey University, 2007), 121.
109 Nightingale, Maori at Work, 121.
110 Palmer.
111 “Home Mission Board report on Maori work,” The Methodist Church of New Zealand Minutes of the Annual Conference (Auckland, 1933), 131.
singing. Programmes such as “Forget Your Troubles – and Sing” and “Stand up and Sing,” encouraged community singing in cities such as Wellington and Dunedin. The Sings were a weekly event in many centres, in a town hall or theatre, during winter and spring. People were encouraged to bring lunches and knitting and to make an event out of the occasion. The Sings were predominantly good fun, but with a serious agenda: to bond struggling communities together and to fundraise for charities.

Similarly, the MHMP continued to bring communities together to alleviate the financial strain on the Home Mission Fund (HMF). In October 1930, the Wanganui Methodist Churches collectively “secured the Opera House for an after Church recital on Sunday night and were delighted to see 700 people present.” A phenomenal gathering the next Monday witnessed more than a thousand people paying admission to see the choir perform. Despite the economic conditions, people were willing to pay to hear the MHMP and to fundraise for charities, making such events a community activity. In a typical year, the MHMP would raise substantial sums for the HMF, usually amounting to £1,400 pounds per year. The choir had such high attendance for their concerts that they (along with several other fundraising initiatives) raised £13,000 for the mission department in 1930.

Despite their extraordinary success in raising funds, the MHMP came up against some opposition. In 1930, unnamed complainants felt that the choir was not representative of the Home Mission Department and therefore that it should not be used as a delegate party for the Methodist Church. A carefully worded report made it clear that as long as work was carried out among Maori, the choir had an important place in educating Methodist congregations. The report acknowledged that in practical terms, the MHMP was a necessary tool by which to secure large sums for

---

112 Radio Record published the weekly radio programmes in New Zealand from 1927-1939, until the New Zealand Listener replaced it in 1939.
115 Bourke, Blue Smoke, 48-49.
117 NZMT (1 April 1933), 6.
the mission work that had to be done. “The Home Missions Department,” it continued, “cannot respond to one-tenths of the claims made upon it unless more money is available. In this way, the method has more than justified itself, though much more money is immediately necessary.”

This minor controversy highlights that on many levels, the MHMP were a practical solution to the financial problems of the circuits within the church. Indeed, Methodist Ministers and Conference delegates acknowledged that in practical terms, the MHMP could not be disbanded until a suitable replacement deputation was found because a debilitating drop in the Home Mission Fund income would result. Set in the context of a deepening depression we can see that the MHMP contended with financial and social problems while continuing to provide entertainment and music for New Zealanders. Although such a group could not be fully representative of the Methodist Church as some complained, they placed native Maori culture in the limelight and asked communities to consider their mission.

In response to the complaints, Seamer felt compelled to make changes to the structure of the MHMP. These changes were based on making the group more efficient. In 1933 Seamer was elected as President to the annual Conference of the New Zealand Methodist Church, a role that entailed heavy administrative responsibilities. Consequentially Seamer was unable to regularly attend the circuits, so encouraged Maori leaders within the choir to take charge, including Reverend Te Uira Tuteao, Sister Ropata, Reverend Hohepa Tutawhaio and Reverend Tahupotiki Haddon.

Before making changes to the MHMP, Seamer sought opinions from his congregations. He thought it necessary to test the waters so “sent a circular to circuits throughout the North and South Islands, suggesting that a deputation other than the Maori Party might be arranged for 1934.” Replies came flooding back to the Home Mission Office, expressing hope that the choir would continue its annual visits. Only four replies throughout the entire South Island favoured some other type of deputation. The Wellington District was the only district in the North Island that felt another type of deputation for 1934 would be well received. The Wellington Circuit

120 NZMT (1 April 1933), 6.
121 “Opening Ceremony,” NZMT (4 March 1933), 5.
had received the MHMP annually since its inception in 1924, and it is likely that some were keen for a variation.

In response to these calls for changes to the MHMP, Seamer came up with two solutions. The first major change was that Seamer split the large choir into two groups in 1933, while the second took place in 1934. The mixed gender choir was called the Methodist Home Mission Party and the second was called the Maori Male Voice Choir. The latter choir was organised and led by Sister Ropata, a Maori deaconess who later gave up her vocation to marry Joe Moss (another choir member). She was described as “a fine leader” who commanded respect from audiences and communities. This group presented an entirely new programme and made the Home Mission Appeal from a slightly different angle throughout the South Island in 1934. Upon their arrival in each community, the choirs were sent to different churches and carried out the functions that took Seamer much longer with the original choir. By splitting the choir into two groups, they could cover more ground and present new performances and thus keep their shows fresh.


124 “Wellington District,” NZMT (23 December 1933), 3.
During 1933, the MHMP continued its touring pattern. They began by touring the South Island. In April 1933, the MHMP performed at Ellesmere in Christchurch.\(^{125}\) In July some select members of the choir paid a visit to Princess Te Puea’s Pa at Waiuku. Invited guests included senior choir members Reverend Tahupotiki Haddon, Reverend Eruera Te Tuhi, Chairman of the North Auckland District, Reverend Matene Keepa, Chairman of the Waikato-King Country District, Tutu Keepa, of Wesley College, as well as Sister Nicholls. Te Puea had invited these Methodist representatives to visit her extensive land development scheme being carried out as part of the Ngata scheme.\(^{126}\) Visitations such as these were important in maintaining a strong relationship with Maori projects and kept the Methodist Church near the heart of the King movement. In August, the choir gave a well-received series of concerts in Wellington. The *Evening Post* remarked that, “the popularity of the concerts by Maori entertainers seems by no means to diminish in Wellington…” A solo by Tono Tikao greatly impressed the audience, with a rendition of *Home, little Maori, Home* and as an encore he sang *Somewhere a Voice is Calling*.\(^{127}\)

The final change to the MHMP was to officially change their title in 1934. After being called the Methodist Home Mission Party for ten years, the group were renamed the Waiata Maori Choir (WMC).\(^{128}\) By removing the connection to Methodism their new name opened doors to a broader audience from within the communities they visited, encouraging people irrespective of religious inclination to attend the choir’s performances. The spin off for broadening their audience was having access to a larger financial pool. As 1934 came to a close, the Waiata Maori Choir was stronger than ever and was building towards it largest tour yet, which would see the group travel to Australia.

---

\(^{126}\) “Our Maori Mission,” *NZMT* (22 July 1933), 3.
\(^{127}\) “Fine Voices,” *Evening Post* (9 August 1933), 3.
\(^{128}\) Mori Pickering, “Memories on the Waiata Maori Choir,” 2.
Conclusion

The development of the Methodist Home Mission Party from 1924 until it became the Waiata Maori Choir in 1934, testifies to the diverse and hybridised music culture of New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s. The choir was a notable case in a long history of indigenous Maori live performances. The tradition of travelling performers filled a demand for Maori culture throughout the country and meant that Seamer’s choir was not out of the ordinary. Other groups carried out similar functions, including the Rotorua Home Mission Entertainers, Te Puea’s TPM, and Ratana’s travelling choir. The MHMP illustrates how live performance traditions were used by Maori communities and individuals for religious, political, financial, and educative purposes. The stage was a method by which to achieve these goals, as well as develop individually and bring people together through the shared enjoyment of music.

The MHMP also illuminates the variety of live performance genres apparent within New Zealand. These genres included religious hymnody and choral traditions and also hybridised Maori experience of Christianity, which was evident in Maori hymnody and adaptations. Other genres were Western Christian musical practices, Western classical and instrumental characteristics to some extent, and hybridised versions of both popularised Maori and European music. Maori music had currency during the twentieth century and was often a draw card for audiences. The music imported into New Zealand such as jazz music, American “black” music and patriotic war themed songs, all reveal the diverse and constantly changing music culture. Furthermore, the MHMP existed during advancements in radio transmission, which changed the ways that performers advertised and performed. There was no apparent conflict between the popularity of live performance and the radio, as communities still preferred to gather at concerts or sometimes around the radio for their entertainment. The MHMP existed in a vibrant and ever-changing musical environment, one in which music continued to hold an important place in society – bringing people of all ages, cultures and religions together in a semblance of unity.
CHAPTER FOUR

Performing Maori History and Culture on the Australian Stage

This chapter examines the Waiata Maori Choir’s tours of Australia in 1935 and 1937. They performed a version of Maori history and culture to audiences during their tours through New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania, and South and Western Australia. These performances did not differ significantly from those given to New Zealand audiences in the previous eleven years, yet their reception was different. This chapter investigates Australian reception of the WMC through three themes: the religious nature of the choir and their mission work, the musical skills of the WMC, and in their use of education as a vehicle for changing opinions in Australia. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the WMC contributed to Australian audiences’ understanding about Maori culture and history and that they increasingly emphasised pan-tribalism in the 1930s.

A brief examination of Australian society up to the 1930s is needed to place the WMC’s visit to Australia in perspective. Australia was similar to New Zealand in that both were established as colonies of Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While New Zealand was destined purely as a settler colony, from the outset Australia was intended as a penal colony – enormous open prisons made up of officers and convicts – which aimed to alleviate the over-crowded prisons in Britain. In both countries, native populations already inhabited the land. The native population of Australia, known as Aborigines, were poorly equipped to face the intrusion of settlers. Frank Welsh points out that Aboriginal societies were fragmented and lacked the numbers and cohesion to mount a sustained resistance. The arrival of settlers to Australia, accompanied by alcohol, tobacco and all manner of new diseases including smallpox, gravely damaged Aboriginal communities.

4 For example some historians estimated that by 1858 there were just 170,000 Aborigines in Australia. Depending on what total population estimate you follow, if the original population was only 300,000 in 1788, then over sixty years, the loss was
Christianity was transferred to Australia in much the same fashion as New Zealand. Anglicans and Wesleyans were the first missionaries to arrive in the penal colony. The first clergymen despatched with the British prisoners were only peripherally concerned with the Aborigines, seeing their primary responsibility as the welfare of the settlers – and – as Welsh points out – much less so of the convicts; thus Aborigines were mostly neglected in the early years of settlement. Consequently, mission work among Aborigines did not begin until the turn of the nineteenth century. However Samuel Marsden, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) representative in Sydney, had little hope for the Aboriginals as Christians – “they have no Reflection” – and he preferred to concentrate on Maori as “a very superior people in point of mental capacity, requiring but the introduction of Commerce and the Arts, [which] having a natural tendency to inculcate industrious and moral habits, open a way for the introduction of the Gospel.”

In the early 1800s, Wesleyan Reverend Samuel Leigh was involved in establishing churches throughout the first settlements (until he transferred to New Zealand in the 1820s). Methodism was slowly established countrywide among the European settlers, with limited success among the Aboriginal tribes. In 1840, John Smithies was stationed at the Swan River Colony (present day Perth) to attend to the settlers and Aborigines in the area. Smithies established a Wesleyan Mission School, a chapel, and a mission farm during his time at Swan River Colony (1840-1855), but the station was eventually a failure. Methodist administration and circuits

almost one-half. If there were 750,000, three-quarters were lost: John Moloney, *Australia: Our Heritage, A History of a Nation* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd, 2005), 4.
7 The London Mission Society (LMS) established the first school for Aborigines at Parramatta in 1814 (approximately the same time that Reverend Samuel Marsden established a mission and church in New Zealand for Maori). Welsh, *Australia*, 101.
8 Ibid.
9 Leigh opened churches at Castlereagh, Parramatta, Windsor, and Liverpool communities in Australia from 1815-1819. Doust, “Leigh, Samuel (1785-1852).”
were set up throughout Australia and a strong Methodist presence developed, particularly among European Australian communities.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Aboriginal rights within Australian society had not improved. When the issue of federation between New Zealand and Australia came up for discussion in the New Zealand Parliament in 1901, among many Maori there was a real fear of federating, “as the Australians have so long looked down upon the Native race of Australia, they will naturally be prejudiced against the Maoris.”

The Aboriginal population (then not included in the census) was estimated at about 80,000 in 1914. They had been denied ownership of land since British settlement on the principle that Australia was terra nullius. In New Zealand, Maori had been granted British citizenship and even representation in Parliament. Aborigines were considered second-class citizens by the Australian government and a policy of forcibly removing Aboriginal children from their homes and placing them in European homes and in separate schools was carried out between the years of 1910 until 1970.

Like most societies, music was a feature of both pre- and post-European settlement in Australia. Aboriginal music was a topic of research for Europeans studying “primitive cultures” well into the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed, there were some commentators in both countries who felt that Aboriginal music was dying out as they became increasingly more “civilised.” An *Evening Post* report in 1932 noted, “All the coast natives are sophisticated now… At La Perouse there are still one or two old men who can sing the aboriginal ditties, but soon the old customs will be just a memory. The bush natives are passing.” Indeed, Aboriginal music was kept mostly

---

separate from European music, because it was deemed incompatible. Consequently many Australians did not experience Aboriginal music. Ironically, those who did hear Aboriginal music believed the performers to be proficient at music and to have a spirit unseen before.

Music was used as a method for developing a growing Australian national sentiment in the twentieth century. Numerous bush themed songs depicting the Australian outback and the beauty of the landscape characterise this period. The 1938 International Broadcasting Union concert illustrates the pervading attitudes within Australian music. Australia presented the fourth world concert, which was broadcast to British and American audiences. The concert opened with Australian birdcalls including the native kookaburra, the whip-bird and the lyrebird sounds. These characteristic sounds of the outback were followed by a series of Aboriginal songs, almost as if they were only one step removed from the landscape (the songs were collected and arranged by Dr. H. O Lethbridge) and an Aboriginal corroboree (ceremonial gathering to invoke the Dreamtime through dance, music and costume).

Following this was a series of European compositions including a Male Voice Choir singing *The Stock Rider’s Song*, an unaccompanied chorus singing *Bush Night Song*, a collection of piano compositions by Roy Agnew, including *Rabbit Hill* and *Drifting Mists*, both of which had already made headway throughout the world. To finish the programme the Concert Orchestra performed Percy Grainger’s, *Colonial Song*. This collection of Australian “sounds” serves to confirm the presence and dominance of Western culture, progressing from the primitive sound to the colonial sound and thus subordinating Aborigines. The racial attitudes apparent in Australian musical traditions made it questionable as to how the WMC would be received during their Australian tours in 1935 and again in 1937.

---

Map 2: The Waiata Maori Choir
Tours to Australia, 1935 and 1937

Blue: 1935 Tour to Australia
Green: 1937 Tour to Australia
Australian Tour of 1935

Many prominent Australians had heard the WMC whilst visiting New Zealand and had long been “urging its manager to give Australia an opportunity to hear some of its spectacular, educative and inspiring programmes.” Early in 1935, Seamer accepted an invitation from the Melbourne Pioneers Association Secretary, Isaac Selby, to take the WMC to perform in the final phase of the Victorian centenary celebrations in Australia. Other groups (predominantly Methodist) invited the choir to perform on hearing that they would be visiting. Consequently, correspondence between different Methodist connections throughout Australian townships ensured that a comprehensive tour was arranged.


---

In preparation for their extended visit the WMC toured many of the Methodist circuits in New Zealand in January through to late March in 1935. They were well received, and “people were very lavish in their praise of the concerts as well as sincerely pleased with the behaviour of the young men in their homes.” 22 The WMC loaded a car and two vans on to the ship in Auckland, which would be their transport in Australia. Travelling by car meant that a number of places could “be visited en route that otherwise would not have had the privilege of hearing this unique and fascinating party.” 23 Speaking at the farewell gathering in the Auckland Town Hall, Reverend Haddon, who was the WMC chaplain, quoted the choir’s aims for their tour, saying, “We are seeking to uphold the dignity of the Maori race and the New Zealand people of our great Church.” 24

Image 7: Reverend Seamer’s car was loaded on to the boat before the Waiata Maori Choir departed for Australia in 1935. Moss Collection, MCNZA, Christchurch. 25

23 “The Waiata Maori Choir and its Australian Tour,” The Burra Record (22 May 1935), 1.
25 Photographic collection, Moss Collection, MCNZA, Christchurch.
The choir’s role as cultural ambassadors was pronounced in Australia because the majority of the Australian public had not encountered Maori before. Of course, there had been some degree of cultural interchange between Australia and New Zealand in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Some Maori performers made the crossing to Australia as early as the 1860s. An early example was that of a Maori concert party led by Mr Ferris, who took a group of between thirty to forty men and women from Ngaati Maru in Thames, to perform “war dances and illustrations of Maori life and manners” for Australian spectators at the New South Wales Exhibition held in Sydney, Australia in 1879.26 Performing to new audiences, groups such as Ferris’ briefly brought indigenous Maori culture to life for Australian audiences.

At the turn of the twentieth century the Australian government made provisions for Maori who were living in the country. In 1902 the first Commonwealth Franchise Act was passed in Australia, which allowed Maori living in that country to vote if they were already on the electoral role (a right not extended to all Australian Aborigines until 1962).27 As British subjects, Maori could access Australian facilities and communities, but it seemed that few took up the opportunity to live there. The 1933 census reveals that only 197 Maori lived in Australia.28 While some Maori had chosen to live there, by 1935 many Australians (especially those in more isolated locations) had not been exposed to Maori people or culture.

Those chosen for the tour of the WMC needed to be able to leave family and employment without undue trouble. This was because of the length of the tour and the inability of the Methodist Church to provide adequate financial reimbursement for their services. Touring members needed to be in their late teens or older, healthy and educated, vocally talented, well versed in Maoritanga and competent in English. The chosen touring members were experienced performers who had assisted Seamer in the group for many years. Indeed some had been involved since the beginning, including Taka Ropata, Mori Pickering and the most senior performer, Reverend Haddon.29

28 Ibid.
Twenty members were selected to represent the Maori race to the people of Australia in the 1935 tour. For most of the members it was the first time they had travelled outside of New Zealand. Australian audiences were told that each was “a member of a prominent Chieftain family of some large tribe, and who has been selected to represent that tribe.”

Notably, the tribal affiliations of the members were not disclosed to their audiences and typically only their regional location was provided, generating a sense of Maori identity rather than multiple tribal ones. There were four representatives from the South Island, including Tutawhaio of Southland, Mori Ellison (Pickering) of Otago, Tono Piuraki Tikao of Canterbury and Hori Hauauru from Bluff. Three hailed from Taranaki including Haddon, Rupeni Mateo and Hikuroa Te Maaha; two originated from the Waikato who were siblings, Te Ako and Raiha Pihama; from Rotorua came Tutu Keepa; Dave Tutaeo Manihera hailed from the King Country; Ane Tangaire from Gisborne; Hinerangi Hikuroa came from Wanganui; from Hokianga came Sister Marama Muriwai; Tamati Maruera originated from Ngapuhi in Northland, Inia Te Wiata was living in Wellington, Rangikeya Karamain and Mihi Waikare were from Thames and the East Cape respectively; and Airini Grennell was from the Chatham Islands.

---

31 “Soprano Singer the Star,” *Barrier Miner* (7 June 1935), 2.
By March 1935, the twenty choir members had perfected their concert programme. In a similar style to the programme presented in New Zealand, the choir usually staged their large combined concerts in two halves, entitled “Maori of Yesterday” and “Maori of To-day.” In the first half of the programme, choir members demonstrated life in an ancient Maori village, with maidens engaged in various industries and a sentinel who warned the villagers of the approach of friendly visitors. While a feast was in progress, the sentinel gave an alarm; and in this section a fierce battle was acted out with the “raiding” party (other members of the choir). The invaders were defeated and their victory was celebrated with a dance of triumph (haka). The staged village environment enabled the audiences to visualise what Maori life was like in the past. Theatre Studies author, Christopher Balme, suggests that symbols were used as a method of representation for “undeciphered

---

32 “Fine voices: Maoris entertain,” Evening Post (9 August 1933), 3.
33 Sydney Morning Herald (29 March 1935), 12.
complexities” of a culture. In the case of the WMC, the display of village life, with symbols such as the costumes, the lush scenery painted in the background and the props used for demonstrating Maori games enabled the representation of a diverse range of cultural activities in a simplified presentation. Although the village scenes were staged, they gave the impression of authenticity to Western audiences.

The second half of the programme, called “Maori of Today,” focused on modern Maori traditions. This section was comprised of instrumental and vocal solos, choruses and dances with guitar, mandolin and banjo accompaniments. This half enabled freedom for the members to perform individual music, duets and songs, which came from a variety of genres and regions. These elements illustrated the influence of American and European musical traditions, and also demonstrated Maori ability to adapt and learn such styles of music. By performing modern and hybridised music such as popularised tunes, secular music and performing in different languages, the choir fostered a modern expression of Maori culture. For Western audiences this was “a stirring exhibition marked by much vigour and precision.” The WMC used music to represent traditional culture, yet also as a symbol of the progress that was occurring for Maori.

The WMC opened its first Australian season in New South Wales where they were keenly anticipated. They gave concerts in Sydney for two days before travelling south. In early April the choir spent a week in Australian Capital Territory (ACT). They gave a concert at the Albert Hall in Canberra on 6 April, which was described as “a concert novel in the entertainment history of Canberra,” which had “not a dull or unenjoyable moment.” For many in the audience, it would have been the first time they had seen Maori culture and music performed on the stage. The audiences particularly enjoyed the Poi Waka, “on which Hikuroa and the Choir were accorded sustained applause.” The reviewer also described the concluding haka and war dance as being “beautiful to watch.”

37 “Maori Choir,” Sydney Morning Herald (29 March 1935), 12.
The choir left ACT and travelled south to fulfil their centenary engagements in Victoria. “Leading newspapers speak in glowing terms of both the high entertaining qualities and the educational value of the programmes,” wrote *The Gippsland Times*, “while music critics say that the chorus singing is a revelation of what can be done with the human voice.” Such enthusiastic praise in the early days of their tour gives some indication of the reception the WMC had in the following months. The WMC broadcast an Anzac Day programme on 25 April during their time in Melbourne as well. This performance undoubtedly connected Maori and Europeans together on that day of remembrance, which had significance for Seamer and many others who were affected by the war. Reverend Tutawhaio, perhaps signalling the importance the occasion had for him, kept a postcard photograph of the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne.

Image 9: Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne Australia.

41 “Anzac Day Celebrations to be Broadcast,” *The Advertiser* (20 April 1935), 7.
The choir toured through South Australia from May until mid-way until June. Accompanying the group were Reverend Samuel Forsyth and the manager of the Kuitpo Colony, W. H. Tucker. On one Sunday in Adelaide “nine services were conducted or aided by groups of the choir members, as well as a huge Pleasant Sunday Afternoon sacred concert.” Newspapers reported in June that some fans followed the choir to hear them again, including one group who followed the choir to Port Pirie, in the Spencer Gulf north of Adelaide. They also performed in the West’s Theatre, Adelaide, where they gave a colourful and varied programme. The Advertiser reviewer wrote of the choir that, “excitement was blended with dignity, and a musical style of intoning lent a touch of fantasy.” Such statements positively reinforced the WMC mission and generated interest in their music throughout communities.

From late July until October in 1935, the choir made an extensive three-month trip around the state of Queensland. The WMC visited Brisbane in August, making social visits along their tour. They accompanied Mr and Mrs W. H. Green to visit a garden farm of Mr and Mrs. William Amy at Victoria Point. Presumably this was to enjoy the Australian countryside. Indeed, the choir did enjoy their sightseeing in Australia. Haddon commented in a speech to the Townsville audience that he felt “the beauties of North Queensland, rivalled, if not surpassed, the bush scenery of New Zealand.” The choir’s trip to Queensland was considered “unique in the history of Cairns, and the choristers held a large audience enthralled…” Their musical programme was described as being “bright and tuneful,” and included The Rosary, Old Virginny, In Absence, and Waiata Poi, all to guitar and ukulele accompaniment.

In order to cover more ground in the large state of Queensland, the WMC split into two smaller choirs. The Male Choir performed at Innisfail and Atherton

44 “Soprano Singer the Star,” Barrier Miner (7 June 1935), 2.
46 “Social Notes,” Courier Mail (23 August 1935), 23.
49 Ibid.
from 10 to 12 September, while the Ladies Choir performed at Ingham in Cairns. On 14 September, “a large and appreciative audience attended the concert of the WMC at the Olympia Theatre.” By the beginning of October they were still busy giving matinees, evening performances and visiting schools in the Queensland state. By this stage, some of the choir members such as Te Uira Tuteao found the tropical climate of the northern Queensland state too warm for their comfort. The WMC excelled themselves in their return performance at the Brisbane Town Hall, which was under patronage of the vice-regal Sir Leslie Wilson, who was accompanied by his wife, Lady Wilson and their daughter Marjorie Wilson. The choir gave a varied repertoire, performing Maori choruses to well-known English, Scottish, Welsh and French airs.

Image 10: The Waiata Maori Choir with Mayor Vice-Regal Sir Leslie Wilson, who was accompanied by his wife, Lady Wilson and their daughter Marjorie Wilson.

Shortly after their successful return season in Brisbane, the WMC returned to New Zealand on the *Marama*, leaving Sydney on 20 October 1935. The tour to Australia had been a success and requests for their return were made as soon as they had left. The WMC conducted a brief tour through the main centres of the North Island before they disbanded for the year.\(^53\)

While the WMC were travelling in Australia, ministers and Home Missionaries, working principally in their own districts, carried out the bulk of the mission work in New Zealand. While the work in most instances was done with a high degree of efficiency, in a few cases the financial results were not adequate for the circuit needs. “It is evident that even with the most efficient and faithful service of such deputations,” wrote an author in the *NZMT*, “we have not yet evolved a satisfactory alternative to the Maori Choir for making a popular appeal to those people who are on the fringe of Church life.”\(^54\)

In 1936 the choir came together again to make its annual tour throughout New Zealand. The financial burdens of the Home Mission Fund continued to be a focus for the choir even though the effects of the depression had softened. Seamer gave a keynote speech to the Methodist Conference and spoke of the far-reaching work of his department. He said that the Home and Maori mission Departments aimed to raise £13,500 in 1936 to enable them to carry out their programmes. Seamer noted that “a handsome sum of £600, part of the proceeds of the Waiata Maori Choir’s tour in Australia, was available towards their big effort, and several other generous gifts had already been received.”\(^55\)

**The 1937 Australian Tour**

The success of the 1935 tour encouraged consideration of another tour in 1937. A five-month tour of Australia in 1937 was organised in response to invitations, much the same as two years previously. Seamer was very unwell in 1937, suffering from constant headaches that were the result of his old war injury.\(^56\)

---

56 In May 1918, while Seamer ministered to the wounded in a French village, a German shell burst in the room where he was working, and although he escaped death, he had permanent damage to his inner ears, causing constant pain and physical
have prompted him and some of the leaders within the choir to decide that Seamer could use the tour as a chance to recuperate. The five-month tour to Australia was extended to a year long journey and the choir leaders made plans to travel to England and America afterwards. Seamer arranged to receive treatment in England and he was given leave of absence from his work for twelve months. In his absence Reverend Edward Drake assisted with administrative work and carrying out the special visiting throughout the circuits. Consequently, Seamer stepped down from managing the choir during this tour and took the time to rest with friends and family. Seamer wrote in August that year, “Relief from the burden of official responsibility and five month’s rest have certainly helped me, and renewing early friendships and revisiting the scenes I loved in my boyhood days has been a great delight.”

In preparation for their second tour to Australia, Seamer and several choir leaders made decisions regarding the extent and scale of the tour. The choir itself was to be under the direction of several leading members, including Reverend Tutawhaio and Sister Margaret Nicholls. Collectively they decided that a wise precaution was “to have a testing period for new members and a fairly long series of farewell concerts in New Zealand under purely Maori leadership, for that testing period revealed weakness which the members themselves helped to adjust.” Indeed, Seamer commented that the Maori leaders in the choir still left the final selection for the choir in his hands – a responsibility that he took very seriously.

Seamer began combing New Zealand in early January 1937 to ask past and present members if they would take part in the much longer tour. When Seamer approached Te Uira Tuteao Manihera to join the choir, Manihera had no reservations. Manihera obtained permission from Te Puea Herangi, in whose community at Ngaruawahia he was living, who consented because his performance with the choir would enhance the mana of the Maori King Koroki and the Waikato region. “Go with the blessing of our King and with the pride of our ancestors,” Te Puea wrote to

---

discomfort. Head noises and sudden blackouts were regular throughout Seamer’s life: W. T. Blight, “The President,” NZMT (18 February 1933), 34.
Laurenson, Te Hahi Weteriana, 230.
58 “Letter from Reverend A J Seamer” (9 October 1937), 9.
59 “Movements of the Choir,” NZMT (28 August 1937), 4. Sadly, Reverend Haddon, who had accompanied the WMC for many years, passed away suddenly early in 1937: Reverend G. I. Laurenson, Te Hahi Weteriana (Wesley Historical Society, 1972), 230.
Manihera on 3 March 1937. The twenty-one strong choir included Hinerangi Hikuroa, Sister Taka Ropata, Merena Kaitaia, Ane Tangaire, A. Tahiwi, Mihi Waikare, sisters Airini and Hinemoa (Linda) Grennell, the Otakau siblings Mori and George Ellison, Tutu Keepa, Tamati Maruera, Rupene Mateo, Tono Piuraki Tikao (Barrett), Enoka Tuac, Ererua Te Tuhi, U. Woodright, and Hironi Wikirawhi.

Seamer was not always successful in his entreaties to potential touring members. He asked Inia Te Wiata and Bill Poutapu to join the choir in 1937, both of whom were also living at Ngaruawahia with Te Puea Herangi. Poutapu had a good natural voice, added to which was his vast knowledge of Maoritanga, which made him a good candidate, however Poutapu’s commitments in New Zealand meant he was not prepared to leave for such a long time. Te Wiata had agreed to carve for King Koroki’s new residence alongside Poutapu. He was also the drawcard attraction for Te Puea’s touring choir, TPM. In the end, Te Wiata told Seamer that he could not travel to England.

The tour to Australia (and England) was guaranteed by the financial commitment of eight members – one Pakeha and seven Maori. Together they advanced two thousand pounds to “make the tour possible for educational and inspirational purposes primarily, and for the honour of the Maori race.” Such financial commitment illustrates the dedication of the members to their mission to educate audiences around the world. Seamer wrote in 1937 that the choir worked in Australia under the direction of the Home Mission Departments, and under the arrangements, the choir received little more than travelling and general expenses.

When the choir eventually departed from Auckland on the Awatea in late March 1937, a large crowd at the wharf bid them farewell:

The strains of beautiful choir singing floated between ship and wharf when the Awatea sailed from Auckland at the end of last week, with the Waiata Maori Choir aboard, sailing on

62 Bill Poutapu was Te Puea Herangi’s top carver and was in charge of training Inia Te Wiata in the art of Maori carving. He lived with Te Puea at Ngaruawahia for most of his life.
63 Te Wiata, Most Happy Fella, 17-18.
64 King noted that Te Wiata’s name was the only one singled out for mention on the poster advertising the northern tour of New Zealand: King, Te Puea, 193.
the first stage of their world tour, which will include America and England. A large and representative gathering of Maori friends assembled on the wharf to bid them farewell… The Waiaita party boarded the Awatea by the stern gangway, and the group immediately took up a position just above, their singing attracting many to the vicinity.\textsuperscript{66}

On arrival in Sydney, New South Wales, the WMC opened their tour with a brief season. Their performance at the Conservatorium on 27 March presented stone-age games and various native scenes, while scenic and lighting effects of New Zealand backgrounds were used to “reproduce as near as possible their native surroundings.”\textsuperscript{67} A newspaper wrote of their time in New South Wales, “The choir performed at Gippsland, Bairnsdale and Sale as separate choirs and in the larger cities the Waiata Maori Choir united for large audiences.”\textsuperscript{68}

Following this tour, rather than travelling to Canberra, the WMC sailed to Tasmania for twelve days in April where they received a warm welcome.\textsuperscript{69} The Tasmanian Home Mission Secretary, Reverend H. M. Knuckey assisted in the preparations for the state tour and also participated at each performance by introducing the choir. The choir visited New Norfolk, Hobart and Launceston, giving two or three concerts in each city.\textsuperscript{70} At the City Hall in Hobart, an audience estimated at three thousand people that included the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress, the Wignalls, watched the “unique entertainment.”\textsuperscript{71} The choir’s visit was perceived as a “means of providing Launceston residents with a glimpse of the Maori people,” and audiences “could not but have been impressed with the beautiful natural voices of the Maoris, both in singing and speaking, and their fine physical bearing.” Similarly, the haka created amusement, and “the rolling of the eyes and tongues and the general facial animation of the performers were different anything previously seen.”\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{67} “Waiata Maori Choir,” \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} (20 March 1937), 10.
\textsuperscript{68} “The Times,” \textit{Gippsland Times} (22 April 1937), 8.
\textsuperscript{70} “Waiata Maori Choir,” \textit{Examiner} (10 April 1937), 1.
\textsuperscript{71} “Maori Choir,” \textit{The Mercury} (6 April 1937), 7.
\textsuperscript{72} “Waiata Maori Choir,” \textit{Examiner} (9 April 1937), 8.
They sailed to Victoria midway through April 1937 where, “A large and enthusiastic audience welcomed the WMC at the opening concert of its return season.”

The Argus reported that “Individual talent and good teamwork are artfully mingled in this unique entertained which has the dual fascination of novelty and skill.” They toured from May to June in Victoria, and included towns such as Camperdown on 3 June, where they performed in the Theatre Royal. The WMC were given civic reception at Bendigo by the Mayor W. M. Bolton, while the women choir members were tendered a civic reception in the Eaglehawk Town Hall by the Mayor G. W. Jenkins. Seamer visited each state at the same time as the WMC and kept in touch if his health permitted. During their Victorian state tour Seamer resided in Melbourne with his brother Reverend William Seamer.

When the WMC visited South Australia, Seamer made his home at Mr W. Davidson’s Parkside Adelaide. “It is the Rev. A. J. Seamer’s intention to arrange his own itinerary so as to always be in touch with the Choir by long distance telephone.” The WMC’s season in South Australia began mid-June. The tour was

73 “Maori Choir,” The Argus (19 April 1937), 4.
74 Ibid.
76 “Geelong and District,” The Argus 918 May 1937), 4.
predominantly organised by the Central Mission on Franklin Street, Adelaide. They paid a short visit to Burra on 15 June, while the Reverend J. P. H. Tillbrook, of Kooringa, carried out the tour arrangements. The Mayor, Mr S. Kellaway, welcomed the choir. At West’s Olympia Theatre in Adelaide they presented the usual array of English music, traditional Maori music and games, hakas, poi dances, and as The Mail described it, “a strange and interesting pageantry.”

The choir performed in suburban halls at Victor Harbour and Mount Barker and later toured several other districts. On 27 June a “quartet from the Waiata Maori Choir” gave a performance at the Pirie Street Methodist Church; a morning service was given at Norwood Wesley Church; and the Maughan Church also had a programme of Maori and English music. The sheer number of performances across Australia is astounding, particularly when considering that the WMC performed each day of the week, and sometimes performing up to three concerts or services a day.

The 1937 tour differed from 1935, in that instead of touring Queensland, the WMC toured Western Australia for two weeks. Leaving the port of Adelaide on the steamship Jervis Bay, the choir arrived in Fremantle, Western Australia on 9 August. The visit to Western Australian Methodists conveniently broke up their longer journey to England. The only state excluded in either tour was the Northern Territory, presumably because no invitations came to the WMC or because of the difficulty in travelling there. In all, the combination of the two tours meant that most Methodist connections in the large continent were explored.

The WMC typically separated into smaller choirs of ten people during both tours, called Choir “A” and Choir “1.” In the larger towns and cities, the two small choirs would come together to perform at full capacity. For example, the full choir performed at both the Fremantle Town Hall, in Perth and in Anzac House on 13 August 1937. A sample of the extent of the small choir’s duties went along these lines: during their first week in Western Australia, Choir “A” performed at Leederville Town Hall in a matinee performance, at King’s Hall, Subiaco in the evening, at Maylands Town Hall on Wednesday, and the Myola Hall, Claremont, on

78 “Waiata Maori Choir to visit Adelaide,” The Advertiser (5 June 1937), 27.
80 “Maori Choir to Perform at Wests,” The Mail (19 June 1937), 24.
81 “Maori Choir Concert again Charms,” The Advertiser (28 June 1937), 11.
82 “Church notes,” The Advertiser (26 June 1937), 8.
the Thursday; meanwhile, Choir “1” appeared at Cottesloe Picture Theatre on the Tuesday afternoon, Victoria Park Town Hall in the evening, at Midland Junction Town Hall on Wednesday, and Northam Town Hall on Thursday.\textsuperscript{83} By covering much larger distances and greater numbers of towns, the two choirs were able to engage with more Australian audiences.

**Methodism, Music and Maori on the Australian Stage**

We now turn to investigate the reception that Australian audiences gave to the Waiata Maori Choir during both tours. In each Australian state, Methodist institutions and local citizens hosted the choir and generally organised their schedules. For example, the Methodist Home Mission Society of South Australia organised a matinee for children and three full concerts from Sunday to Tuesday.\textsuperscript{84} Two members were typically billeted together with Methodists.\textsuperscript{85} When the WMC were divided into smaller groups, billeting was much more achievable for communities, who only had to find accommodation for half of the choir. Choir member George Ellison said in an interview, “in certain parts of Australia, they hadn’t seen Maoris... but we were treated very very well indeed. We were just one of the family when we were there. They were always sorry to see us go and we were sorry to leave.”\textsuperscript{86} The Methodist Church offered thanks to those who hosted the choir while in Broken Hill: “All people who so kindly offered their homes and hospitality to the visitors, and who placed their cars at their disposal are thanked by the church. The choir will always remember Broken Hill people for their cordial welcome and genial hospitality.”\textsuperscript{87} Billeting with local residents meant that the choir members and communities interacted in greater depth, learning about each other’s cultures and lifestyles.

Most of the WMC’s audiences consisted of Methodist congregations throughout the two Australian tours. Methodist deaconess Airini Hobbs commented that the choir had a strong Methodist mission connection in Australia: the choir “entertained the local Methodists at halls, and took part in many Church services.”\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{83} “The Waiata Maori Choir,” *The West Australian* (7 August 1937), 16.
\textsuperscript{84} “Maori Choir Here,” *Barrier Miner* (15 July 1937), 5.
\textsuperscript{85} The Burra Record (20 July 1937), 2.
\textsuperscript{86} Interview with George Ellison, “My Kind of Town,” Radio broadcast, extract from cassette tape in Archives, Dunedin Public Library: MH 7/1.
\textsuperscript{87} “Church, Men and Matters,” *Barrier Miner* (24 July 1937), 6.
\textsuperscript{88} “Rene’s Story,” MS 524: 155/1, 34 (Christchurch: MCNZA).
At most towns choir members performed in morning church services, gave afternoon ceremonies at Sunday school, and then gave evening ceremonies and performances, where they could preach about the Maori race and their mission in Australia. At Broken Hill in 1937 for example, the choir was split into five small groups and sent to perform at different Methodist churches in the region: Sulphide-Blende Church, Central Street Church, Lane Street Church, Oxide Street Church and Mica Street Church.

The WMC were testimony to the success of the Methodist mission in New Zealand while travelling through Australia. Audiences came to understand the religious beliefs of the choir members, which may have served to enhance audiences’ reception of the choir throughout both tours. The choir’s Christian agenda was “to interpret Maori life and Methodist mission enterprise to the Australian people.” The Burra Record noted, “Although a Maori Mission group, in accepting the pressing invitations received [they] will come to Australia as an independent unit, seeking to render assistance and give a message to, and receive support from the general public.” The choir members’ Methodism simultaneously indicated that Christian faith existed among Maori in New Zealand and that the mission work had been successful.

Christian charity work was a feature of the WMC’s tours to Australia. “Although the objective of the Choir is not finance, but ‘Education and Inspiration’ and everything is organised from this standpoint, yet, the tour… has been a financial success.” Audiences were supportive of the choir’s mission, seeing it as a worthy cause. Most states offered support for the choir’s mission in fundraising for the continuation of mission work among Maori and Aborigines. Seamer noted, “A proportion of the proceeds of our performances go to local charities and missions and a portion towards missionary and educational work among the Maoris.” In South Australia, the proceeds from the concerts were equally divided between the Adelaide Central Mission and the New Zealand Home Mission Fund. The various Australian

---

89 “Church, Men and Matters,” Barrier Miner (17 July 1937), 6.
90 Ibid.
94 “Maori Choir,” The West Australian (9 August 1937), 16.
95 “Maori Choir,” The Advertiser (7 May 1935), 16.
charities that the choir donated to in 1935 profited to the extent of some three thousand pounds, while three New Zealand funds profited by a total of seventeen hundred pounds (including the £600 donated in 1936). Indeed, wrote Seamer, “the Waiata Maori Choir rendered a great service to Australian Methodism.”

The WMC also donated money to the Methodist Aboriginal Mission. A contemporary recalled, “They [the choir] made a lot of money for expenses and for the Mission Work, both here and in Australia for the Aboriginal Mission.” The newspapers recognised that “the Waiata Maori Party has not only rendered great service to the Church, but also to public causes, and consequently is supported by people of all classes and creeds.” The division of funds was around fifteen per cent to Australian mission funds and eighty-five per cent to the New Zealand department (especially as this money carried the tour expenses as well). Seamer pointed out that they had given over two thousand pounds towards local causes in August 1937, despite the fact that the tour expenses were heavy. One newspaper noted, “The choirs have actually raised more for other funds than for their own Maori Mission Fund, needy as that fund is to-day.”

Many reviews were emphatic in their support of music as a vehicle for salvation. In particular, the Bishop of Tasmania commented that, “The example of the visitors in their devotion to home missions came as a reminder that in Tasmania the [mission] work was supported by Methodists, Congregationists and the Church of England, and all other sections of the Christian Church.” A dignitary in Tasmania, Mr. Bowes reflected on the religious sentiment that the choir presented, remarking that, “the Methodist faith was a singing faith, full of joy and melody, and the Maori choirs came to show them this beautiful side of Christian life.” Of course, many of the public reports regarding the reception of the choir are typically those of Methodist

---

98 “Rene’s Story,” MS 524: 155/1, 34 (Christchurch: MCNZ).
99 “Maori Choir,” Barrier Miner (1 June 1935), 3.
100 “Maori Concert,” The Mercury (5 April 1937), 5.
101 “Maori Choir,” The West Australian (9 August 1937), 16.
102 “Waiata Maori Choir to Visit City,” Barrier Miner (10 July 1937), 2.
104 Ibid.
clergymen, and consequently this makes it difficult to obtain a balanced judgement about Australian responses to the choir.

Responses of non-clerical figures to the WMC were similar to their religious counterparts. Isaac Selby, Secretary of the Old Pioneers’ Association, Melbourne (who had initially invited the choir) thanked Seamer personally for their visit: “I congratulate you on the great success of the programme… and the visit of your choir has been quite a distinctive feature in our Centenary celebrations.” The vice regal Lady Huntingfield also wrote to Seamer to express her thanks to the choir for their performance in the Melbourne Town Hall. She wrote, “We were deeply impressed not only by the singing of the choir, but by the spirit which animated them expressed on the banner (the Maori Mission Flag) under which they sang and by their happy faces.”

The reception of the WMC crossed over Methodist and religious connections into local government. Across most of the Australian states, civic receptions were usually hosted for them during both tours. In Queensland, “the choir marched up the main street headed by the town band, and were accorded a civic reception by the Mayor, E. W. Russell.” Acceptance and welcomes from local governments encouraged communities to support the choir, especially those outside of the Methodist Church. One example was in Melbourne when the Acting Lord Mayor, Councillor Sir William Brunton, received the choir at the Town Hall on 15 April 1937. He expressed his belief that their unique performance would be an enjoyable alternative entertainment in the state: “I feel certain that your singing will be a welcome contrast to the tinned music we hear so often on the air now.”

The WMC received a civic reception in every major city it visited until Perth, Western Australia. It came as a surprise to Seamer when the choir were not only refused a civic reception by the acting Lord Mayor of Perth, but that it came with a refusal to acknowledge them as a non-professional mission choir. To local papers, Seamer outlined his wonderment as to “why of all the cities in the Commonwealth, Perth should fail to give the choir a civic reception?” The acting Lord Mayor

105 Letter from Mr Isaac Selby to Reverend Seamer, NZMT (6 July 1935), 4.
106 Letter from Lady Huntingfield to Reverend Seamer, NZMT (6 July 1935), 4.
109 “Civic Dignity,” The Western Argus (31 August 1937), 13.
defended his action by declaring that the choir were professionals: “Visitors on professional or semi-professional business are not accorded civic receptions.”¹¹⁰

An outcry followed this denial of a civic reception for the WMC. The controversy made headline news in the Sunday Times (Perth, WA), which argued that, “to defend this boorishness by dabbing [sic] them professionals, was rather an ignoble way of excusing the action.”¹¹¹ Another newspaper wrote, “The exclusion of the Maori Choir from the ordinary courtesy given to bodies travelling from one Dominion to another, suggests something approaching meanness.”¹¹² Even New Zealand dignitaries entered the fray: “The Waiata Maori Choir deserves all the support that we in the Old Country can give them,” wrote Lord Bledisloe, Governor-General of New Zealand “both on account of their outstanding accomplishments, and in recognition of the merits of the good cause which they seek so unselfishly to promote.”¹¹³ Such controversies only served to highlight the positive reception that the WMC received in Australia throughout their tour.

Despite the controversy in Perth, the WMC generated a shared cultural memory of Maori society for Australians. In chapter three I discussed Deloria’s argument for cultural expectations of Native Indians and their “sound.”¹¹⁴ As many Australians were unfamiliar with Maori culture, when the WMC performed their version of culture and history, they established a broader expression of Maori sound. One author in the New Zealand Methodist Times noted that “to all New Zealanders in Adelaide, the words of the song Waiata Poi bring memories of home… nothing makes New Zealanders more homesick than to hear those haunting, rhythmic melodies of the Maoris of their homeland.”¹¹⁵ Performing Maori history and culture made such characteristics both audible and visible signifiers for both the native people and for audiences viewing it.

¹¹⁰ “Maoris did not get civic welcome; they protest,” The Daily News (19 August 1937), MS 539: 185/4 (Christchurch: MCNZ).
¹¹¹ “Civic Snub,” Sunday Times (29 August 1937), 1.
¹¹³ “Civic Snub,” 1.
¹¹⁴ Philip J. Deloria, Indians in Unexpected Places (University of Kansas Press, 2004), 184.
Many Australian audiences admired the traditional Maori powhiri. The choir “gripped the audience from the outset by the novel manner in which the Maori were announced,” wrote one critic. Though not all would have agreed there were those who believed “The chance to see real Maoris, garbed in native costume, doing wild dances of their forefathers and singing the haunting melodies that make you laugh and want to cry, comes once in a lifetime.” The WMC were praised for their indigenous performances in South Australia and Victoria. A reviewer wrote in 1935 that, “Apart from the novelty of the entertainment, the audience found new enlightenment in some of the items, particularly the rhythm of the Maori music and the stirring effect of the hakas.” During the choir’s Western Australian tour in August 1937, “Picturesque native dress, strange chanting, arresting action songs and fascinating rhythmic movements held audiences captivated.”

The choir charmed and enthralled audiences with their canoe poi dance. The varied group of songs given by the choir included a love song, a lament, and a fisherman’s song. The choir was so popular in South Australia that extra performances were held to cater for the large turnouts to concerts. Plans made by local groups to entertain the choir were sometimes sacrificed to enable extra performances. The Methodist Women’s Home Mission Association found that the “pressure of the Waiata Maori Choir’s musical engagements” made it necessary to cancel the reception arranged for them. Similarly, the choir were so anticipated that they were heavily inundated with bookings for their final concert at Anzac House, Perth. Management was forced to hold the scheduled choir performance in a larger hall, His Majesty’s Theatre, for 20 and 21 August 1937 to cater for the huge audiences.

Just as poi dance was popular in Australia, many audiences were affected by the Maori haka. On the stage, haka became less fearsome and the threat of death became spectacle. A Cairns Post reviewer revealed that some did not understand the intent and historical purpose of haka, writing that “the singers have an appealing and

116 “Maoris Please Large Audience,” Barrier Miner (8 June 1935), 3.
119 “Maori Choir,” The West Australian (14 August 1937), 8.
120 “Maori Choir Concert again Charms,” The Advertiser (28 June 1937), 11.
121 “Reception to Maori Choir Cancelled,” The Advertiser (26 June 1937), 27.
congenial style and they romped their way through the lighter hakas, much to the
delight of the audience, who insisted on numerous encores.”¹²³ The audience was
separated from the performers and the meaning of the haka was changed to something
less confronting: haka became a novel and thrilling performance, carried out to
entertain not to threaten. In this form, the haka was a great success with audiences in
Australia.

Audiences may have perceived Maori as being linguistically talented. Throughout their performances, choir members sang in both English and Maori
music, and they varied Methodist Church hymnody with secular, classical, and
popular music. The choir demonstrated not only their religious knowledge, but also
“an aptitude for languages.”¹²⁴ The intertwining of European and Maori music was an
important avenue that the choir took which aided their popularity. Queensland
audiences were “appreciative of the Maoris’ distinctive ability in the interpretation of
European music.”¹²⁵ Furthermore, audiences appreciated the English songs a great
deal: “many items in English, and several English ballads – were enthusiastically
received,” while “National dances and Action Songs added novelty, the exuberance of
the artists being in keeping with the demands of the subject.”¹²⁶ The choir’s ability to
move freely between one language and the other, and then into combinations of the
two, demonstrated that hybridisation was the norm and that Maori culture was a living
form – adaptable to its environment and foreign influences. Reception to these talents
was typically positive and in some cases some demonstrated amazement.

The assumed inherent musical talents of the choir members also impressed
some Australian audiences. They were described more generally as “natural
musicians,” who revealed “a wonderful sense of syncopation in their singing and
remarkable rhythm in their dancing.”¹²⁷ One must also consider that each of the
members had been carefully chosen for their vocal abilities and knowledge of Maori
history, which may have skewed the interpretation of the group. The choir’s skill in

¹²³ One imagines that had the audiences watched a haka performed with true intent of
violent victory or even death, the audience would not have demanded an encore:
“Maori Harmony,” Cairns Post (12 September 1935), 8.
¹²⁴ “Visit of Maori Choir,” Examiner (8 April 1937), 8.
¹²⁷ The alliteration used in the article might suggest some playfulness by the author in
describing the WMC’s performance: “Maoris Please Large Audience,” Barrier Miner
(8 June 1935), 3.
performing choral works without a musical conductor bore testimony to this talent, as was the fact that most members were also able instrumentalists. One paper excitedly reported that the dominant impression of the Maori race made by the WMC was “that of a rich, beautiful, and dignified native culture subtly interfused with much that is best in English musical tradition.” Thus the choir demonstrated the successful fusion of European musical styles with Maori traditional songs and language.

Just as there were those who were impressed by the Waiata Maori Choir’s singing – others were intrigued by the racial element they brought to their performances. The WMC’s goal to disseminate information about Maori history and culture was a role undertaken by Seamer or other native leaders, such as the Reverend’s Haddon, Te Tuhi and Tutawhaio. They would typically make speeches during a performance to clarify Maori racial origins to Australian audiences, including the history of the Maori people and of their migration from Hawaiki to New Zealand. Various commentators remarked how they learned that “the Maori race was not strictly an aboriginal race of New Zealand as many people thought.” Many audiences declared their amazement and interest in the topic after listening to the choir perform, and some critics “generally admitted that these choirs are the best present day exponents of Maori music and customs.”

Through performance on the stage, the WMC attempted to change perceptions about Maori. As was typical in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century racial ideology, Maori were thought to be a “dying race.” Imperial historians Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper commented on these common beliefs, writing that European elites in the nineteenth century were “confident of the superiority of their civilisation and their capacity to dominate others.” Indeed, race became a key division among humankind during colonisation and a harsh white-black dichotomy that was reinforced by “scientific” arguments emphasising that races were distinct and unequal.

128 “Maori Choir,” The Mercury (6 April 1937), 7.
132 Burbank and Cooper, Empires in World History, 325.
The choir hoped to change the discourse and common beliefs of both New Zealanders and Australians that only the strongest races survived colonial introduction of Western diseases. Seamer made a strong indictment of the treatment of Maori by Pakeha, stating,

While the white man had given them the Gospel he had also introduced a great number of vices. The result was that the Maori population had dropped to about 40,000. The tide has now changed and numbers are increasing.\textsuperscript{133}

“Biological assimilation with non-Maori was accepted as their destiny,” writes historian Angela Wanhalla. She noted that some prominent Maori leaders of the early twentieth century, such as Sir Maui Pomare believed that intermarriage offered a way for the Maori population to survive. However, they did not agree with officials that intermarriage would lead to absorption and finally the disappearance of Maori.\textsuperscript{134} The population decline had been turned around and the Maori population was burgeoning by the 1920s and 1930s. For Reverend Seamer, Maori extinction was not an option for the Maori people and, “The only remedy is religious education.”\textsuperscript{135} While there were many pathways for Maori to take into the future, for Seamer (and many contemporaries) most, if not all of the options, involved some form of assimilation with an aim toward becoming civilised and integrated citizens in a “New Zealand culture.”

The WMC displayed their version of Maori progress and integration into European New Zealand culture to Australian audiences. Throughout their performances, the choir declared that equality existed between Maori and European New Zealanders. Sydney audiences were told, “The intermarriage of Maoris and British had been an outstanding success” and that “there was no great gap between the British and the Maoris.”\textsuperscript{136} “The Maoris today,” said Reverend Tutawhaio in another service, had achieved “equality with Europeans, were trained in the same schools, entered the same trades and professions, and enjoyed all the privileges of the British

\textsuperscript{133} “Visitor from the Home Mission,” \textit{Otago Witness} (20 May 1924), 49.
\textsuperscript{136} “Maoris and British,” \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} (30 March 1937), 10.
who lived in New Zealand.”  

137 This version of racial equality built an image of harmonious and mutually beneficial relations between the two cultures. Australian audiences may well have drawn comparisons between Maori and Pakeha and their own standing with the Aborigines of Australia. For some audiences, the final cementing of relations between Maori and Pakeha “came with the Great War, when over 22,000 Maoris went to Gallipoli and to France to fight for their home and Empire.”  

138 Statements of racial equality fell short of reality for most Maori in the 1930s. Just as churches were relatively separated, there were also divisions more broadly. Although education was claimed to be equal by most policy-makers, most Maori were educated in separate schools for trades and professions such as nursing or domestic service. Maori were also at a disadvantage to European children because of the decline in the use of Maori language. In 1903, educational authorities officially discouraged the use of Maori as a medium of instruction and communication within schools.  

139 This systemic separation continued from the education sphere into the workforce, and consequently to the social and economic situations of many Maori. While outwardly a type of equality was apparent in New Zealand; inwardly, this equality was shallow and governed by the expectations of the dominant Pakeha culture. Although the WMC outlined a simplified history of Maori culture to Australian audiences, they did place Maori culture in the spotlight. While they may not have intended to change the status quo, the WMC opened the door for others to make changes on the wave of their positively received performances.

Although contradictions are apparent between the choir’s version of Maori history and culture, and reality, there may be plausible reasons for these discrepancies. The choir was working within the system in order to convey the vision they wanted for Maori. The WMC members stood for the improved Maori situation, especially for those Maori who were succeeding and rising to prominence in New Zealand society. However the choir did not necessarily convey reality regarding race.

relations or tribal formations to Australian audiences. They smoothed over tribal identities for audiences and conveyed a unified Maori world, but this world was not necessarily representative of all Maori.

The WMC did bolster efforts to retain Maori culture through performances on the stage. Their efforts can be seen within the broader cultural revival among Maori in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1926, Gordon Coates and Sir Apirana Ngata started a Maori crafts and carving school at Rotorua. They also set up a Board of Ethnological Research to encourage the publication of Maori material.\(^\text{140}\) Ngata collected and recorded hundreds of the songs and chants of the various tribes all over the country over a period of forty years, and had them published in four volumes, *Nga Moteatea: The Songs*.\(^\text{141}\) The WMC can be seen as positively reinforcing the work being carried out during this Maori cultural revival.

Whether viewed as rose-tinted or not, the result of the WMC’s mission among Australians was that audiences gave greater credence towards Maori as a people. For example, the Bishop in Tasmania said that the choir members were not only citizens of a Dominion of great importance to the Empire, but that they:

… Belonged to a race for which all British people had a tremendous admiration. Go back in history as far as they could, they would always have the finest impression of the character and chivalry of the Maori race.\(^\text{142}\)

Mr. Walklate, a Tasmanian dignitary also confirmed the sentiment that Maori were a strong people, “unlike other races who had withered in contact with European civilisation, the Maoris were a strong race in body and mind, and had survived the weakening influences to which they had been exposed.”\(^\text{143}\) While not stated explicitly, this kind of response infers that some Australians were aware of the weakening influences that the Western world had on their own Aboriginal race.

The success of the WMC’s tours may have precipitated demand for New Zealand music in Australia. Other denominations invited other New Zealand religious denominations.


\(^{143}\) Ibid.
choirs soon after the 1937 tour. “For the first time in New Zealand history,” commented Reverend Frederick A. Bennett, “a Church of England Maori choir has been invited to Australia.” Bennett’s Rotorua Maori Choir participated in the Samuel Marsden commemoration celebrations in Sydney in 1938. “This wonderful choir,” wrote an *Evening Post* article, presented a programme that consisted of “anthems, solos, negro spirituals, Maori items and action songs.” Notably, Bennett’s choir illuminates the emergence of modern Maori action songs and the integration of African American musical influence in such displays of Maori and Christian culture. Most importantly, Bennett’s visit signals the ultimate success of the WMC in opening Australia to greater cultural interaction between the two countries and their indigenous people.

**Conclusion**

The Australian stage provided a new site where traditional performances could be re-enacted to acclaim. Through performing Maori culture and history to Australian audiences the WMC’s tours of Australia in 1935 and 1937 reveal the variety of responses to such displays. The reception to the WMC’s religious agenda, their musical and language skills, and their educational messages was mostly positive. Expressions of gratitude were given to the WMC for having been given the opportunity to listen and learn about Maori culture.

The vision of better Maori and Pakeha relations was one of the goals of the WMC, who negotiated their vision of Maori within the realm of Pakeha expectation. This vision of taking the best of both Maori and Pakeha cultures, illustrates that some Maori – and indeed the WMC – had a part to play in the creation of cross-cultural interaction. The stage then, was a highly useful tool for interacting and intersecting with Australians, where performers and audiences alike were mutually influenced by the demonstrations of culture, and were also potentially changed for the betterment of both peoples. While New Zealand Maori appeared to be moving towards pan-tribalism and biculturalism, this may have left some Australian audiences wondering at the slow progress of their relationship with native Aborigines.

---

CHAPTER FIVE

Performing Maori Culture for the Empire: 
A Tour of Great Britain, 1937 – 1938

The Waiata Maori Choir travelled to Britain on the steamship, the S. S. Oxford, which sailed from Fremantle, Australia to London, England on 23 August. Their tour of Britain from August 1937 to April 1938 opened a chapter in the history of New Zealand music. The journey to Britain involved challenging and broadening the members’ horizons, while the ensuing seven-month tour through the townships and cities of England, Ireland and Wales offered ample opportunities for new experiences.

The reception of the WMC by British audiences was somewhat different than in New Zealand and Australia and is examined throughout the detailing of the choir’s itinerary. Three lenses are used to focus this discussion. Themes include examining the religious and civic responses to the WMC’s Methodism; exploring the divergent responses to the music culture they presented; and investigating the validity and success of the WMC’s use of education as a vehicle for change. Performance of Maori history and culture on the international stage opened pathways for choir members to develop as individuals, as Maori, and as New Zealand citizens who were also part of the British Empire.

Journey Overseas

The choir, plus twenty-seven others, made up the forty-eight passengers on board the Oxford. Mori Pickering recalled that once the ship was on the way, “sports clubs are [were] formed plus Pictures and Dances, there is no room for a dull moment.” Presumably the choir used the long journey to prepare for performances and work on individual presentations. Seamer, having not had a great deal of time with the choir in Australia, was “looking forward to close contact with them on the boat, with a devotional hour every day,” in which all would take part.

Foreign travel was a component of the choir’s experience of music. Most of the choir members had never travelled further than Australia and the journey to and from Britain opened up a new world to both the male and female members. A few individuals and groups of Maori had made the journey to England, but for many Maori who lived in rural New Zealand, this kind of travel was not typically possible. While the choir members were performers who typically displayed their culture to foreign audiences and generated wonderment, they were also tourists in the destinations they visited. They learned much about different cultures as they travelled across the Indian Ocean, through the Red Sea and across the Mediterranean Sea, and in their subsequent tour of the British world.

---

3 Mori Pickering, Private collection, Dunedin, 14.
5 Bryan Dunne, “‘No Ordinary Tourists’: The Second New Zealand Division in the Middle East, 1939-1943” (MA diss., University of Otago, 1997), 4.
The four-week long journey to Britain was broken up by several stops. The first port of call for the Oxford was at the city of Colombo, the capital of Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka). The choir caught a bus and were guests of a mysterious man for the day; reportedly he entertained royalty and had a private zoo to the north of Colombo: “His people entertained us, we rode on his elephants, dined in his home and altogether enjoyed a wonderful day,” recalled Pickering. After performing for their host they made their way back to the ship to cross to the seaport city of Aden, Yemen, at the bottom eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. “Not a very exciting place,” Pickering remembered, who was unimpressed by the desert, writing, “As I think back there seemed to be large valleys covered with cement.” They stayed in Aden only long enough to have a meal and rest overnight. The WMC’s journey to England aligns with Tony Ballantyne’s idea that the British Empire is drawn together across horizontal and vertical “webs of empire.” The WMC’s visits to Australia and Ceylon (another British colony) contribute to our understanding about how such horizontal webs of empire operated in mutually beneficial ways in the early twentieth century.

---

7 The British colony gained independence in 1972, at which time the country was renamed as Sri Lanka.
8 Pickering, 14.
9 Ibid.
10 Ballantyne put forward a new model for analysing the empire's development in Tony Ballantyne, Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire (Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series, Palgrave, 2001); Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World (Duke University Press, 2006). In both works he suggested that the structure of the British Empire was like a web, with “vertical” connections developing between Britain and its colonies and “horizontal” connections linking various colonies directly.
The WMC continued up the Red Sea to the Suez Canal. There they left their ship in order to avoid the slow journey through the Canal, which consisted of a single-lane passage with only two passing points along the way and contending tidal currents. Instead the WMC motored across Egypt to Cairo. There they enjoyed a full day of sightseeing at the main tourist attractions, “taking in the pyramids as well as all the places and things of interest in Cairo.”

Next, the choir caught a train to Port Said in order to reconnect with their ship, which crossed the Mediterranean Sea and landed at Naples, Italy. Pickering was astounded by the Italian architecture, having never seen anything so grand or elaborate. She wrote in her memoir, “It is beyond my power to describe the beauty of their cathedrals.” The choir left Italy in another ship and made a brief stop at Marseilles on the French Riviera. There the choir members had the opportunity to shop and “had fun practicing French phrases, such as combien [sic] (how much?).” The choir’s penultimate port of call was at Gibraltar, before boarding their ship for the final time and setting sail for England.

---

11 Pickering, 15.
12 Ibid.
13 Note that it should read “combien”: Pickering, 16.
The WMC arrived in England in heavy fog on 23 September 1937. As they moved along the Thames River the choir members stood on the ship’s balcony to get their first glimpse of London. The month long journey had exposed the choir members to strikingly different worlds from New Zealand and Australia, encountering tropical rainforests, broad deserts and vast oceans, strange languages and foods, imposing structures such as the Pyramids of Giza, the beautiful architecture throughout Italy and France, and had surely amassed many untold memories of the Mediterranean and of Europe that would remain with them for their life.

Performing on the British stage

By the time the WMC arrived in Britain, the British economy was recovering from the world economic depression, which had had devastating effects. While New Zealand was involved mainly in agriculture and in the dealing with raw materials (to be exported to Britain) in the twentieth century, Britain was highly industrialised. A large percentage of the population was involved in manufacturing, construction, mining and public utilities. When the WMC toured in 1937, the communities they visited were geared around industries that employed only a comparatively small percentage of the workforce in New Zealand.

The attitude of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) may give some clues as to the political, cultural and economic relations of Britain to its expansive Empire throughout New Zealand, Australia and its other outposts. The first Director-General of BBC, John Reith viewed the Empire as a significant source of broadcasting material and a topic of central concern to national life. Topics on the Empire could, argues British historian John Mackenzie, “be turned to nationalist,
moral, and quasi-religious ends.”\textsuperscript{18} The medium of radio could “contribute to the cohesion of British subjects and of the worldwide family of English-speaking peoples.”\textsuperscript{19} In 1932, the BBC began a tradition of Christmas broadcasts associated with the King’s Christmas messages, which included contributions from colonial territories around the world.\textsuperscript{20} From 1935 onwards an international broadcasting programme was aired annually, with Australia hosting the fourth annual programme in 1938. The visit of the WMC in 1937 was a timely reminder of the British imperial connection to New Zealand.

While imperial connections were emphasised by the WMC’s tour, religious connections to the colonial outpost were also reaffirmed between Britain and New Zealand. British Methodism had become a fractious and diverse denomination in the years following its spread throughout the world in the eighteenth century. After Wesley’s death in 1791 tensions within Wesleyanism led to breakaway movements, such as the Methodist New Connexion, which was inaugurated on 9 August 1797 in Leeds by a group of Wesleyan itinerants who wanted to allow unordained preachers to administer the sacraments.\textsuperscript{21} These tensions also led to new outbreaks of evangelical fervour, notably the Primitive Methodists (1811) and the Bible Christians (1815).\textsuperscript{22}

By the turn of the twentieth century, Methodism was irrevocably changed. Fewer than ten per cent of the world population of Methodists lived in the British Isles while the United States of America (USA) had become the powerhouse (with


\textsuperscript{19} Mackenzie, “The Popular Culture of Empire in Britain,” 218.


over seventy five per cent of Methodist church members located there). A table of world Methodist statistics in the *New History of Methodism* (1909) indicated some 8.7 million Methodist church members and around thirty five million Methodist worshippers spread over six continents at various mission sites, including Australia and New Zealand. Nicholas Temperley illustrates that throughout the vast Methodist Empire a tradition of four-part choir singing reached its apex before World War One and continued to flourish for several more decades. Other liturgical forms, such as Anglican-style chanting, anthems and responses increased.

In 1932, the Methodist Church of England was formed by the reunion of several Methodist sects. In 1939 the three major Methodist denominations in the USA also reunited to form the Methodist Church, with about eight million members. Theological historian Grant Wacker wrote of Methodism’s survival and success: “Though Methodism remained a subspecies of the old Anglican establishment, it proved able to adapt to popular demands for seriousness over frivolity, cooperation over competition, compassion over force and egalitarianism over deference.” The relatively recent merger of the fractious Methodist divisions meant that the WMC arrived during a period of cooperation and improved relations. Indeed, such international visits offered an opportunity to strengthen connections with far-flung outposts of Methodism.

The British society that the WMC encountered in 1937 was diverse, recovering economically and was very open to opportunities to improve international and imperial relationships. The WMC made use of this positive attitude towards

---

26 These being the Wesleyan Methodists, the United Methodists (formed by an earlier union of 1907 between the New Connexion, the United Methodist Free Churches and the Bible Christians), and the Primitive Methodists: Charles Yrigoyen Jr and Susan E. Warrick, eds., *Historical Dictionary of Methodism* (Maryland, Toronto, Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2005), xxx.
27 The Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church (South), and the Methodist Protestant Church formed this new church: Yrigoyen Jr. and Warrick, *Historical Dictionary of Methodism*, xxxiii.
travelling Methodist representatives as a platform to achieve their mission to educate both themselves and British audiences. Seamer wrote of the choir’s objectives in August 1937: “the chief objectives are education and inspiration – for the members of the choir on the one hand and the people they make contact with on the other.”29 One of Seamer’s objectives for members was that they would develop individually and spiritually. He wrote that during the 1937 Australian tour, the members had developed considerably, and “some of them who were at first rather hesitant on the platform are now quite acceptable speakers. Some are proving very effective spiritually in their Sunday work, for they seem to be getting a deeper insight of spiritual reality.”30

Another part of Seamer’s reasoning for the WMC’s tour was to educate the general British public about Maori. British society was mostly unaware of Maori culture in the 1930s. There had been a limited number of Maori performing troupes that had made the long journey to perform in Britain since the nineteenth century. Maori culture was invariably displayed at exhibitions throughout the British Empire. These exhibitions were part of what historian Peter Hoffenberg describes as “exhibition mania” in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.31 One of the earliest recorded travelling Maori groups was Dr M. Gauran’s “Troupe of Maori Warrior Chiefs, Wives and Children,” which travelled to England where they opened on 6 July 1863 to a packed house in the Alhambra Theatre on London’s Leicester Square. They performed a simple tale that introduced a battle and a canoe launching as well as “Games, Sports, Chaunts [sic], Revelries, Song, Dances and the Great War Dance.”32 Patrons confused this group with another Maori party who were in London at the same time with a government interpreter named William Jenkins. The two parties were in stark contrast: one performed “wild, half-naked haka” for appreciative music hall audiences, while the other, a Methodist-sponsored party, were “distinguished New Zealanders” who gave “illustrated lectures” in town and church

30 Ibid.
halls. These groups illuminate that in nineteenth century Britain, both “primitive” and “civilised” Maori received positive receptions by British audiences.

Numerous other Maori groups travelled to Britain late in the nineteenth century. One example in 1895 was a Ngai Tahu family from Waikouaiti who appeared in London as an adjunct to a limelight slide show of New Zealand scenes entitled “Maori Picture, Song and Story.” Another Maori performance group from the Te Arawa tribe near Rotorua, performed at several exhibitions in Australia and Britain. Maggie Papakura, who was known as Makereti (1872-1930), led this group. Makereti had gained fame as a guide in the Whakarewarewa reserve of Rotorua when she showed the thermal wonders to the Duke of York in 1901. In 1911 Makereti took thirty-eight members of her touring party to England, where they performed during the coronation celebrations of George V, which formed part of an Exhibition for the Festival of Empire at White City at Sydenham. Historian Conal McCarthy notes that far from being exploited, Makereti’s group went overseas to “show the work of the Maori… in front of the people of the world.” Indeed, Makereti told the New Zealand press later that they changed local assumptions about native Maori people. “I imagine from the demeanour of those who visited our village that they expected to find people resembling the Australian Aboriginals,” she said, “and they were agreeably surprised.”

33 Mackrell “The Chief Attraction,” 73.
34 New Zealand Mail (5 April 1895), 15, quoted in Mervyn McLean, Maori Music (Auckland University Press, 1996), 322.
39 Hone Morehu Nuku, “Te Tutupa o Te Maori,” Te Pipiwharauroa (No. 153, January 1911), 8; Hone Morehu Nuku, “Te Tutupa o Te Maori,” Te Pipiwharauroa (No. 154, February 1911), 5-7, quoted in Conal McCarthy, “Carving out a Place in the Better Britain of the South Pacific: Maori in New Zealand Museums and Exhibitions,” in
British audiences viewed Maori at another major exhibition in Wembley, England in 1924-1925, yet there was still misinformation regarding this foreign culture. The empire’s dominions had been given unprecedented space to present themselves and each colony was assigned its own pavilion – New Zealand’s was at the western end.\(^{40}\) A number of Maori groups performed and the carved meetinghouse *Mataatua* was reassembled from the carvings that had been sitting in the South Kensington Museum since the 1880s.\(^ {41}\) However, *Mataatua* was hastily constructed, with exterior walls made of reddish brown asbestos sheets and the roof completed with English thatch.\(^ {42}\) While Makereti was involved in the training of the performers, others were in charge of constructing the meetinghouse and the incorrect display indicates that British curators still had much to learn about Maori culture and practices.\(^ {43}\) While individuals and performers had already forged a path for Maori, a dearth of understanding by British people was still apparent by the 1930s. The WMC hoped to be a vehicle to generate better understanding between Maori and the British people.

When the WMC visited in 1937 they encountered another major difference in Britain, the musical traditions, which were firmly rooted in European and British Western Classical style. A sample of the concerts and productions being put on in London theatres in the late 1930s were British in theme and intent, including items such as *The King of Nowhere* by James Bridle, and the *London Rhapsody*. A European choral tradition was prevalent, with The Bach Choir staging *St. Matthew’s Passion* and the Royal Choral Society performing Beethoven regularly.\(^ {44}\) As well as choral and vocal works, audiences could watch Western-style orchestras and chamber music. The closest in style that Britain had to indigenous music was folk music from

---


\(^{41}\) McCarthy, “Carving out a Place in the Better Britain of the South Pacific,” 18-19.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 19.


\(^{44}\) “Concerts,” *The Times* (28 March 1938), 12.
Ireland, Scotland and Wales. However many of these styles had been transferred to New Zealand during colonisation, so were not new to the Maori choir. Transversely, the existence of folk music traditions appears to have fostered openness the WMC in the outer regions, while in London city there was less willingness to see the choir on its own unique terms. Competing alongside these traditional modes of musical transmission and entertainment in Britain was the increasingly popular picture theatre. With all of these competing musical and entertainment outlets, British audiences were not found wanting for choice. While in New Zealand the WMC’s programmes were relatively common and were generally enjoyed by many, in Britain, on a new stage with new audiences, they were out of the ordinary.

A comprehensive tour throughout Britain was arranged for the WMC and saw them travel through England, Wales and Ireland. Their itinerary can be visualised in the map above. On arrival in London, Seamer left the choir party and resided with his friend George Harrison Russell to undergo his treatment. Prior to the choir’s arrival in September, Harrison Russell placed an advertisement for the WMC in *The Musical Times*, calling for engagements to be made during their tour of the British Isles.

---

DON’T ! MISS !!
THE FAMOUS MAORI ARTISTES
from **Romantic New Zealand**
*Fresh from Triumphal Tour of Australia*

**HEAR**–Polynesian Music, Enchanting Harmonies, Topical Choruses.
**SEE**–Weird Waiata, Thrilling Hakas, Bewitching ‘Poi’ Dances.

**Touring the British Isles, 1937-8**
**OPEN FOR ENGAGEMENTS. Apply**–
G. Harrison Russell, 6, Lindisfarne Road, London, S.W.20

Illustration 6: This advertisement was published in *The Musical Times* in September 1937.

---

45 Katherine Hepburn was a popular film star in London during the 1930s and the papers were full of her praise: “New films in London,” *The Times* (28 March 1938), 12.
47 *The Musical Times* (September 1937), 774.
Before beginning their seven-month long tour, the WMC spent their first few days in London sightseeing. The members visited attractions such as Buckingham Palace, Trafalgar Square, and even made a tour of Madame Tussaud’s House of Wax Museum.

The WMC toured under the direction of a London Committee and in cooperation with the Methodist Central Mission and Circuits. In collaboration with these committees and many others throughout the country, proceeds from the concerts were to benefit the churches and halls the choir visited. Seamer noted that fifty per cent of the net profits of concerts were devoted to the local United Kingdom missions and charities, while, “The choir will receive the other fifty per cent for their travelling and general expenses (no salaries are paid), and as you know, the final credit balance in the choir fund, if any, will be devoted to Maori educational and mission work.”

Publicity was arranged through these Methodist fixtures. The WMC themselves managed to spread the word of their arrival by playing up to their “native appearance.” The choir members were determined to demonstrate their Maori culture and used publicity to gain exposure. The Advertiser remarked, “The novelty of the Maoris walking in their native costumes in the streets of London was naturally the signal for the gathering of crowds of interested citizens, and for the clicks of the cameras of press photographers.”

The WMC’s first official function was a civic reception in the Methodist Guildhall. They sang to capacity audiences at the Methodist Church Hall in Westminster, as well as to other large London halls. The Lord Mayor of London, Sir George Broadbridge, and his wife met the choir on 4 October 1937, giving gracious speeches during the civic reception and highlighting the interest engendered by the choir’s visit. The WMC performed Hinemoa and an action song for the couple, and Lady Broadbridge was presented with a pair of pois. The reporter noted that, “Seamer suggested that she might care to hear the choir sing in English. However she preferred to hear Maori.”

George Ellison recalled that in London they received packed halls

49 “Scores in London,” The Advertiser (9 November 1937), 8.
51 Pickering, Private collection, 18.
everywhere and would visit schools in the area.\textsuperscript{53} The extension of local government support in Britain enabled greater community acceptance and possibly the inadvertent advertising may have bolstered attendance to the choir’s performances.

An early indication of the WMC’s reception in England was made apparent in the opinion of a young New Zealand expatriate. Kathleen Bailey was a New Zealand citizen who had been living and travelling throughout England for two years. Bailey commented with disdain about her experience of watching the WMC in October 1937, not long after they had arrived:

We were all going to hear a Maori concert given by the Waiata Choir in the Kingsway Hall. What Maori songs the choir sang were good but when they sang English songs I could have shot them. Is there anything worse in the world than a Maori girl sitting down at a piano, in her Maori dress,

\textsuperscript{53} George Ellison, “My Kind of Town” Radio Broadcast Tape 1, Dunedin Public Library Archives.
playing her own accompaniment and singing.........“Danny Boy”. This finished us! Why are people such fools? Nothing does such concerts so much harm as this sort of thing. The choir was a Methodist / Missionary crowd doing this singing for missionary funds. Their houses would have been much fuller had they kept to their own line.54

Such honest remarks point to initial responses to the WMC. Bailey was twenty-six years old when she heard the choir, and was accompanied by her brother and sister-in-law.55 Bailey’s opinion suggests some degree of “cultural cringe” or embarrassment of her New Zealand heritage in London. While only one individual’s opinion on the choir’s performance, Bailey’s comment possibly highlights an invisible thread of social division: Maori could perform on the stage, but only if they performed items that did not challenge the status quo of British dominance. Bailey’s reaction potentially also points to a class division within music. Maori music did not have any economic or class place in England, yet songs such as Danny Boy, did have class affiliations in the popular domain. Such private criticisms would not have been apparent to the WMC however, and they carried on.

There were some public reviews of the WMC that were similar to Bailey’s private comments. The London Times music critic wrote, “The music, though well executed, was for the most part of European origin and not very good in quality at that.”56 The critic concluded it was a pity that the Maoris’ obvious musical ability had been “nourished on bad anthems and cheap ballads.”57 Another London critic felt the choir’s English “deteriorated in tone and intonation as it became more ‘evangelised,’” and “when the solo singers essayed English ‘mush’ they indulged in scoopings and other sobsister tricks with which we of this British nation are only too familiar.”58 Such remarks reveal that an ethos of musical connoisseurship was apparent in London.

54 A note of thanks goes to Genevieve de Pont, whose doctoral research on the diaries of numerous New Zealand people in the twentieth century uncovered this example of contemporary opinion on the WMC: Kathleen Bailey, Diary entry, vol. 4 (July 12-November 14 1937), 108-109. Auckland War Memorial Museum Library: 95/15.
55 Bailey was born 7 November 1910. She returned to New Zealand not long after having attended the choir’s concert. Bailey was from the suburb of Otahuhu in Auckland and her extensive diaries, which chronicled her voyages, were donated to the Auckland Museum Library after having been found under a house.
57 Ibid.
58 “The Maori Concert Racial and Artistic Interest” (2 February 1938), MS 539: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ)
city. Such musical differentiation was not as vocal or apparent in other regions as it was in London, thus highlighting a dynamic musical tapestry throughout the United Kingdom. In this case, some British reviewers (and individuals) did not appreciate overzealous musical expression. Such comments also reinforce the idea that some public sentiment favoured Maori music over the choir’s English repertoire.

While there were some private and public criticisms of the WMC’s musicality, there was still demand for their performances throughout England and their busy schedule was carried out. An epithet that preceded the choir’s visits was the title “The Popular New Zealand Waiata Maori Choir,” revealing the growing sense of the confidence and support in England, and also as representatives of New Zealand culture on the world stage. The WMC toured the English Midlands in late October and early November, where they visited Birmingham, Nottingham and Derby. The WMC was able to contribute three pounds to the Queen’s Hall Methodist Mission in Derby. The following day, on 29 October they hired a motor coach in Nottingham, and toured in the region. On the night they arrived in Birmingham, the choir performed at the Methodist Central Hall, which was broadcast live on the radio.

60 Receipt from Methodist Mission, Queen’s Hall, Derby, MS539: 19/5 (MCNZ, Christchurch).
61 Receipt from Skill’s Motor Coach Proprietors, Nottingham (29 October 1937), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ).
62 Photograph of the choir arriving in Birmingham, 1937, MS 539: 19/6 (Christchurch: MCNZ).
For most of November the choir performed in Wales, which had a slightly different understanding of Methodism. Welsh Methodism had a distinctive Calvinistic inclination due to the activities of Howell Harris, Daniel Rowland and other Welsh revivalists in the eighteenth century. The WMC visited a number of Methodist churches, including the Wesleyan Chapels at Aberystwyth, Carmarthen, Cardiff and Port Talbot, and as to be expected they were well received by both religious and civil groups. The WMC were given several invitations to civic receptions while in Aberystwyth and Cardiff. Welsh audiences were generally

---

63 Colleges for the training of ministers were established at Bala in 1837, Trevecka in 1842, and Aberystwyth in 1906 and in 1933, the Calvinistic Methodist or Presbyterian Church of Wales Act created a legal identity for the church and gave equal standing to the two titles of Methodism in Wales: Geraint Tudur, “Welsh Calvinistic Methodism,” in Charles Yrigoyen Jr. and Susan E. Warrick, eds., *Historical Dictionary of Methodism* (Maryland, Toronto, Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2005), 317-8.

64 Invitation to meet Waiata Maori Choir from Borough of Aberystwyth (1 November 1937), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ); and Invitation to Rev Hohepa Tutawhaio from City of Cardiff to Reception (23 November 1937, MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ).
impressed by the WMC’s performances and their concerts often attracted large and enthusiastic crowds and received praise for their programmes from both European musical critics and Maori experts. Some listeners were surprised by the choir’s musical abilities. In Wales, astonishment prevailed: “There is apparently no stage accomplishment that Maoris do not possess. They can sing, dance, and act to perfection. Most spectacular of their features perhaps was the Poi Dance.”

The WMC travelled between each Welsh city by bus, as they did through Carmarthen on 10 November. The choir dined at the Walnut Tree Hotel on 12 November at Port Talbot as they continued to tour and perform in the region. A Welsh newspaper reported that the choir “was a striking example of minority survival because the choristers sang sacred music with a profound sincerity and because as a cabaret show it was strides ahead of what is normally regarded as popular music.”

Some audiences perceived the choir’s performances within the cabaret musical genre and, in this respect, the choir’s novelty and distinctness as New Zealand representatives were framed within a recognisable performance tradition.

While travelling had its upsides the tour of Britain also had its downsides. Having made their tour in winter, Britain was cold. The choir members considered parts of Britain to be surprisingly backward. Hinerangi Hikuroa recalled:

They didn’t have proper washing places and that was quite a new experience for us. In New Zealand at that time, we had hot running water. But in some places we would heat the water in a copper and then ladle the water out. In Wales they only had wooden tubs. Sometimes you only had a hand basin. We expected more.

Historian Peter Scott confirms that the diffusion of most classic consumer durables (fridges, washing machines, vacuum cleaners etc) remained very limited in Britain in

---

65 “Maori Choir at Taunton,” MS539: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZA).
66 “Maori Singers in Cardiff,” MS539: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZA).
67 Invoice and receipt from the Western Welsh Omnibus Company Ltd (10 November 1937), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZA).
68 Invoice, Walnut Tree Hotel, Port Talbot (12 November 1937), Moss Collection, MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZA).
69 “Maori Singers in Cardiff.”
This was in part due to the electrical services available throughout Britain: in 1931 on thirty two per cent of homes were wired for electricity, however, by 1938, this figure had increased to sixtyfive per cent. Such comments reveal not that New Zealand was more advanced than Britain in the 1930s, but that the economic and social standing of the Maori members themselves were above what most New Zealanders considered normal living standards (and even some British citizens). Most rural communities in New Zealand in the 1930s did not have widespread access to electricity or domestic amenities until well after the Second World War, and thus the choir members most likely came from urban-based wealthy families.

Keeping up their touring pace, on 30 November the choir made their way to Midsomer Norton Methodist Church, near Bristol. Next the WMC visited Bristol and Tiverton where they stayed in the Lorna Doone Hotel. In mid-December they toured Cornwall comprehensively, visiting Methodist Churches and town halls in Porthleven, Bideford, Tavistock, Redruth, Helston, Truro, Falmouth and Penzance. In the New Year the WMC continued their extensive tour of Cornwall, performing in the townships of Camborne, Exeter, Saltash, Bodmin, Buckfastleigh, and Torquay. The choir hired the local town hall in Torquay and also hired a piano for their performance. On 19 January 1938 the choir also performed in Newton and Abbot.

---

72 Ibid., 169.
73 Invoice, Midsomer Methodist Church (30 November 1937), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ).
74 Invoice, Black Swan Garage, Bristol (4 December 1937), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ); and Invoice Lorna Doone Hotel, Tiverton (7 December 1937), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ).
75 Invoice and receipt Penzance Billposting Co (17 December 1937), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ); Invoice, Helston Public Rooms Co. Ltd (23 December 1937), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ); Invoice and receipt, Cornishman Newspaper Co Ltd (29 December 1937), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ); Invoice and receipt, Madeira Hotels Ltd, Falmouth (31 December 1937), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ).
76 Receipt, Borough of Torquay, Hire of Town Hall, (17 January 1938), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ); and Invoice and receipt, Moon and Sons (piano) Ltd (17 January 1938), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ).
77 Invoice, Bodmin Public Rooms Co (3 January 1938), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ); Receipt, Assembly Rooms, Camborne (7 January 1938), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ); Receipt Church House, Saltash (11 January 1938), MS359:
The WMC continued eastwards along the southern coast of England and from 22 to 24 January they visited Plymouth on the coast of Devon. There the WMC received a civic reception on the Saturday and then split into three choirs, giving afternoon and evening performances both Saturday and Sunday. On Monday 24 January, they came together and performed in the Guildhall Pageant.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{78} Waiata Maori Choir’s visit to Plymouth (22-24 January, 1938), MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZA).
As in Australia, accommodation was generally found among the Methodist communities visited in Britain. The choir members were typically billeted in private homes and the members expressed their gratitude to all those who extended hospitality. Pickering felt privileged to be billeted at the home of Sir Charles and Lady Bird during their stay. Sir Charles also organised a visit to the ancient Lord Bute Castle. Billeting meant that the tour was financially achievable because hosting twenty-one members in commercial accommodation was outside the tour budget. However, not all communities could provide sufficient accommodation. In these instances choir members were required to find accommodation in hotels, including in Cornwall.

The WMC did not usually encounter discrimination on their British tour. For most of the choir’s trip to Britain, they were treated with respect and generously welcomed. However, one incident in a Cornish hotel signified an unusual degree of prejudice. The WMC were subjected to discrimination when a group of European patrons staying at the hotel objected to the Maori members’ presence. Consequently, the choir members were asked to leave the premises and find other arrangements. The press latched on to the incident and public sentiment (so the newspaper declared) objected to the hotel’s discrimination based on racial colouring. An article defending the WMC remarked, “In manner, speech and bearing they are a fine advertisement for their race.” Despite the negative tone this incident may have cast on the tour to Cornwall, it does highlight the mostly positive receptions that the WMC received by many members of the British public. In response to the overwhelming support received in the press, Seamer commented “one instance of discrimination threw into relief the fact that in more than a year of touring nothing but the highest honour had been accorded them.”

---

79 The castle must have made quite an impression as Pickering spent some time describing the vast rooms and ornamentation of the stone work in her memoirs: Pickering, Private collection, 18-21.
80 “Colour Line Drawn in Cornish Hotel Again,” Western Independent (23 January 1938). The word “again,” suggests that this discrimination may have occurred before at the hotel and may not be a consequence of the patrons displeasure but of the managers themselves.
82 “City Protest at Bar on Maoris: Incident in the West,” Western Independent (20 January 1938). The incident was also reported in New Zealand: “The Waiata Choir: Successful Tour,” The Evening Post (20 April 1938), 11.
The WMC used such heated debates to educate audiences about Maori culture. As Seamer suspected, the choir found that knowledge about Maori culture in Britain was limited. It became apparent that some British residents did not understand the Maori connection to New Zealand, as Reverend Tutawhaio said in an interview: “Recently, a member of the choir was asked what part of Germany we came from, and another, what part of Abyssinia!” Others had similar ideas to some Australians – that the Maori were an aboriginal people of New Zealand.

The WMC sought to change misguided ideas about Maori history and culture on the British stage. They did so by enacting the progress of Maori from their arrival in New Zealand, to the impacts of European colonisation, right up to the present situation. They emphasised their connection with the British Methodist Church and noted that the pioneering mission work among the Maori since 1822 was justified: “We know there was a great outcry about the money that was spent on sending out missionaries to us years ago,” spoke Reverend Tutawhaio of the controversy sparked

---

84 “City protest at Bar on Maoris.”
85 “War Dance in Guildhall, Demonstration to Lord Mayor,” MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZA).
by Reverend Leigh. He went on to say, “We hope to show you the fruits of that money and to show that it was not wasted.”

The WMC emphasised Maori connections to the British Empire. They commemorated Maori men who joined the force of Anzacs during the Great War by performing plaintive melodies such as those aimed to farewell, such as *E Pari Ra*, thus signalling Maori inclusion in the fight for the British Empire. The education of British audiences further emphasised New Zealand’s imperial connections to Britain. The WMC had some success in changing ideas about Maori. The stage enabled dialogue to occur between Maori and British people, especially during the speech section of their concerts. The Lord Mayor of Guildhall demonstrated the success of this task when he observed, “Although the friends among us are of a different colour, they are still one with us.”

Although the WMC had been the centre of controversy regarding the colour line in Cornwall, bad publicity was publicity nonetheless. Shortly afterwards, a promotional flyer declared that it was the “opportunity of a life time” to see the choir in performance, and that “crowded and enthusiastic audiences follow this party.”

Leaving the mixed responses in Cornwall behind them, the choir travelled to Northern Ireland in February, where they carried out an extensive tour of Methodist churches. John Wesley had introduced Methodism to Ireland between 1747 and 1789 (although George Whitefield visited as early as 1738), and it flourished in Dublin. With five city missions and the establishment of the Wesley College (Dublin), the Methodist College (Belfast) and Gurteen agricultural college in Tipperary, education and religion held an important place among Irish Methodists. The WMC capitalised on this welcoming environment and attended the civic reception by the Mayor of Londonderry, Sir James Wilton and made visits to the cities of Belfast, Londonderry and Coleraine.

---

87 “War Dance in Guildhall, Demonstration to Lord Mayor,” MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ).
88 “War Dance in Guildhall, Demonstration to Lord Mayor,” MS359: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ).
89 “Promotional Flyer for the Waiata Maori Choir” (15 January 1938), MS 539: 185/2 (Christchurch: MCNZ).
While in Belfast, the choir divided into four smaller groups, performing in different Methodist churches and halls simultaneously to assist with spreading their educative mission. The Belfast Central Mission arranged for the four choirs to perform in two churches in the morning and two in the evening. Choir one started off at Crumlin Road Methodist Church and Agnes Street; Choir two performed at the East Belfast Mission on Newtownards Road and at the Mountpottinger Methodist Church; Choir three performed at the Central Mission at Grosvenor Hall and Cregagh Methodist Church; and Choir four performed another Central Mission and Carlisle Road Memorial Methodist Church. The choir also carried out combined performances in Carrickfergus, County Antrim and Bangor, County Down on the

---

weekend of the 14 and 15 February.\textsuperscript{92} Later in February, the choir performed in Coleraine, north of Belfast.

While in Northern Ireland the choir were entertained at Stormont Castle by the Premier of Northern Ireland, and his wife, Lord and Lady Craigavon. Between 1921 and 1972 Stormont Castle was the official residence of the Prime Ministers of Northern Ireland. “We loved Ireland,” wrote Pickering, who recalled:

> The people were so generous in their hospitality. One gentleman wanted to return the kindness he had received from our people when he visited New Zealand and… took us for a one hundred mile drive from Belfast to the great Northern Lake and the mountains of Moine and lunch at the Great Northern Hotel and returned to Belfast.\textsuperscript{93}

Northern Irish responses to the WMC were effusive, with reports of packed out halls and success in achieving their mission to educate audiences about Maori. In Belfast the object of the choir was made clear to audiences, which was “to give and to gain an education and inspiration.”\textsuperscript{94} The success of their mission in Ireland is evident in the \textit{Londonderry Sentinel} report on 8 February 1938: “The Londonderry Guildhall was taxed to its utmost capacity last night when the world-famous Waiata Maori Choir concluded their weekend stay in the city with a magnificent musical pageant.”

The reporter wrote that “the visit of the Maori Choir to the British Isles has done much to remove many erroneous impressions which have existed in the home countries regarding the life and customs of these people, and all… were agreeably surprised.”\textsuperscript{95} A Belfast newspaper also reported that the choir captured the imagination of the audience, and they concluded that, “their best work was done, inevitably in native songs.”\textsuperscript{96} Audiences were also surprised by the choir’s sound:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Pickering, 18.
\textsuperscript{94} “Maori Choir in Coleraine,” \textit{Coleraine Chronicle}, MS 539: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZA).
\textsuperscript{95} “Maori Choir in Londonderry,” \textit{Londonderry Sentinel} (8 February 1938), reprinted in the \textit{NZMT} (7 May 1938), 4.
\textsuperscript{96} “Maori Choir in Belfast Capture Imagination of the Audience,” newspaper clipping from the Moss Collection, MS 539: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZA).
\end{flushright}
“Some of the women’s voices were surprisingly deep – richer than is usual even among contraltos.”

Image 17: The Waiata Maori Choir at a reception given by Lord and Lady Craigavon at Stormont Castle. Waiata Maori Choir Photographic Collection, MCNZ, Auckland.

The WMC toured and performed in London during the final month of their tour in March. They performed farewell concerts at the Kingsway Hall and the Central Hall at Westminster in London on the 29th and 30th March respectively.

97 “Maori Choir in Belfast Capture Imagination of the Audience,” MS 539: 19/5 (Christchurch: MCNZ).
The high point for many in the Waiata Maori Choir was when late in March they received a summons to perform for King George VI and Queen Mary and their daughters at Buckingham Palace. The choir members wore formal attire with Maori cloaks over their shoulders. Twelve of the cloaks were very old and valuable, lent especially for the occasion by Captain T. E. Donne, formerly of the New Zealand Government Tourist Department. They were also accompanied by Mr William J. Jordan, the High Commissioner for the Dominion of New Zealand. The WMC sang two songs for the royal family; a traditional Maori greeting as well as an unpublished Maori part-song. The Queen then asked if they would sing something in English so

---

98 The King and Queen were particularly interested in a cloak worn by the secretary of the choir, Mori Ellison, whose cloak was a family heirloom of great age from the Ngai Tahu tribe: “The Waiata Choir,” Evening Post (April 20 1938), 11.
they performed *How Excellent is Thy Loving Kindness*. In all, the visit occupied half an hour. Most British citizens did not receive invitations to visit the Palace, and the honour of being requested to perform was not lost on the choir members. The royal visit was a highlight for many of the choir members. “The little Princess Elizabeth,” one member recalled, “was thrilled by the items performed.”

The royal summons was a fitting climax to the choir’s tour. Most of the choir left England in the following days.

While the WMC was away, developments in technology enabled New Zealand audiences to listen to them. News that the WMC had made a royal visit was received in New Zealand on 30 March 1938. The broadcast reported, “The King and Queen received the members of the Waiata Maori party who are at present on a visit to Britain.” Both trans-Tasman newspapers had reported on the WMC’s progress during their extended tour: “Their London debut has been most successful. After the first concerts at Westminster Hall and a tour of South Coast towns, a second London season was followed by concerts in the cities of the Midlands.”

The *Evening Post* reprinted the photograph of the choir outside Buckingham Palace.

The radio also enabled news of the WMC to be broadcast in New Zealand and Australia. New Zealand listeners heard their local choir broadcast from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) during their time in Australia. The ABC proved to be a good fundraising venture for the choir as one ABC station reportedly paid them one pound per minute for each broadcast programme.

Similarly, in Britain the BBC asked the choir repeatedly to give sound broadcasts. A single sheet in Seamer’s handwriting depicts one of the choir’s Empire broadcast programmes, which included the haka *Pakia kia rite* and the popular and Westernised Maori songs by Alfred Hill, *Waiata Maori* and *Home Sweet Home*. These broadcasts were heard in New Zealand: “Maori songs by the Waiata Maori Choir which is now on tour in...”

---

101 “Rene’s Story,” MS 524: 155/1, 35 (Christchurch: MCNZA).
102 “Maori Choir at the Palace” in the *Evening Post* (March 31, 1938), 9.
104 “Sport and General Photo,” *Evening Post* (April 19, 1938), 7.
England,” wrote the *Evening Post* in December 1937, “provided material for another interesting transmission.”  

Another aspect of the choir’s tour was the use of the relatively new technology called the television. After try-out broadcasts from the new base at Alexandra Palace to the Radiolympia exhibition in August, a regular service began on 2 November 1936 from the specially constructed studios at Alexandra Palace in North London.  

In that same year the BBC’s Research Department developed the world’s first close-talking, noise-cancelling ribbon microphone for broadcasting speech. Early British television broadcasts included George VI’s coronation, tennis matches at Wimbledon, the Armistice ceremony and even a Test Match against Australia at the Oval. Other broadcasts included regular plays and ballets and some variety programmes.  

The WMC was filmed for a television broadcast during their British tour in December 1937. One reporter wrote that, “The choir has been asked to give not only sound broadcasts, but television broadcast programmes.” The choir were chosen for televised broadcasting for the effective display of their Maori culture in a variety programme: “The added charm given to the choral performance by the wearing of the native Maori dress and by the graceful movements of the native dances was evidently [sic] realised by the British Broadcasting Corporation,” wrote a reporter in November 1937. However, television sets were expensive and idea of transmitting moving images was still only a minority interest. By the end of 1936, the first year of regular broadcasts, only 280 receivers had been sold in Britain. The number of

---

112 Ibid.  
television owners increased rapidly from 1936 until 1939, and, when the war came and transmissions ceased abruptly on 1 September 1939, there were 20,000 sets sold across London. However, most were within twenty-five miles of Alexandra Palace.¹¹⁴

The television audience in 1937 was limited to the few who could afford the technology, amounting to a relatively small group. As a mode for transmitting and advertising the WMC, television would not have been hugely effective. The television broadcast would, however, have been an exciting occasion for the WMC members.

During this tour the choir made further use of advanced technology in Britain by recording some of their repertoire. At “His Master’s Voice” Gramophone Company in London they recorded two 78rpm discs. They chose to record some of their more familiar songs including haka, waiata, choral pieces, and hymns, such as E

---

Ihu E Te Kingi Nui, Aue e Te Iwi E, and Tirohia Mokia. These two discs were the only official records made by the choir throughout its fifteen years of existence. A limited number of advance copies were brought to New Zealand in 1938. Later, in 1947, when the Rangiatea Maori Girl’s Hostel in New Plymouth was built, the music distributors A. H. and A. W. Reed of the Kiwi Record Company in Wellington had these original records reproduced on a long-playing record in their “Archive” series, and they donated the royalties on the sales to the library fund of Rangiatea. The image of the choir outside Buckingham Palace was used on their record cover.

Illustration 9: The Waiata Maori Choir outside Buckingham Palace in March 1938. This image was the front cover of their 1937 LP Album. Reverend Seamer stands on the far right, and next to him is Mr William J. Jordan, the High Commissioner for the Dominion of New Zealand.

115 *Ihu E Te Kingi Nui* translates to English as *O Jesus the Great King*, and the tune is similar to *Rule Britannia*. Copies of the recording can be found in the Alexander Turnbull Library; the Hocken Library; Department of Anthropology at the Auckland University and Pacific Islands; and in the Auckland Methodist Archives.


118 *Famous Waiata Maori Choir*, Kiwi Archive Record.

119 The photograph of the choir’s visit to Buckingham Palace was reported in New Zealand in April. *The Evening Post* (19 April 1938), 7.
The WMC encouraged some British people to contribute to the Methodist mission. Some people came and listened to the choir’s performances and felt moved to help the choir reach their goals through mission work. In London a woman named Hilda Hammond became interested in mission work among the Maori people. She contacted Seamer asking to become a deaconess in New Zealand. “While you were on tour in Great Britain with the Maori choir,” Hammond wrote to Seamer, “I became interested in the work which is being done amongst these people.” Although Hammond later decided not to come to New Zealand, she was highly recommended by William Lea at the London Mission. Such requests indicate the influence that the WMC had on some individuals in Britain.

With the threat of the Second World War (1939-1945) looming, the invitations to visit America were reluctantly declined on official advice. “Had it not been for World War Two pending the Choir would have gone to America as well, but the world situation was looking serious,” wrote choir member, Airini Grennell.

The End of an Era

The choir’s return trip took them across the North Atlantic Ocean, through the Panama Canal and then across the Pacific Ocean to reach Auckland. The Evening Post incorrectly reported that most of the choir members left for Auckland on 21 March 1938, including Seamer, Reverend Te Uira, Hinerangi Hikuroa, Tutu Keepa and eleven others on the steamship the Rotorua. However, their return trip was delayed by the choir’s summons to Buckingham Palace at the end of March and in the end, most of the choir left England on 31 March and arrived in New Zealand on 11

---

123 “Rene’s Story,” MS 524: 155/1, 35 (Christchurch: MCNZA).
124 Famous Waiata Maori Choir, Kiwi Record.
125 “Shipping News,” Evening Post (19 April 1938), 12.
May. Seamer was delayed in leaving England, owing to his editing the proofs of a new Maori Hymn and Service Book.

The choir disembarked at the Auckland port where they were greeted by family and fans. Correspondence between Seamer and his friend Reverend William Lea indicated that a Northland tour was planned soon after returning to New Zealand. Lea wrote he was “glad you [Seamer] have been well enough to have a run through New Zealand… I trust the voyage home did you good.” He went on to say that, “I’m glad that under the circumstances the visit to England proved satisfactory” and he felt “very few would have had the pluck to have taken it on.”

In Auckland the members were reunited on the stage once again. They were given a Civic Reception by Sir Ernest Davis in the Town Hall, which audiences filled to its maximum capacity to hear the choir perform one last time. The reception was broadcast on the radio and again reference was made to “the value of the choir in bringing New Zealand and the Maori people before the people overseas.” After this concert the choir made an extensive tour of North Auckland. At Ngaruawahia they were accorded an enthusiastic Maori welcome home by the full-time and part time agents working at Ngaruawahia Pa. Sister Airini Hobbs recalled that, “Te Puea arranged for a special ‘Welcome Home’ for them [the choir] at the marae as indeed did the Wakarua family at Nukumaru and other maraes. They had won great fame and received quite flattering press criticisms.”

The Maori elders congratulated the party on its success in carrying goodwill abroad and on securing financial assistance for many worthy causes, such as Maori schools.

128 Letter from Reverend William Lea,
130 NZMT (5 November 1938), 4.
131 Laurenson, Te Hahi Weteriana, 233.
132 Letter from Irene Hobbs to Michael King (July 23 1975), 7, MS 524: 155/1 (Christchurch: MCNZ.
133 Famous Waiata Maori Choir, Kiwi Record.
After their celebrations at Ngaruawahia, the WMC disbanded for the last time. The choir members scattered across New Zealand and returned to their respective homes. It is impossible to list in detail what each choir member went on to do in their lives, but the few members who appeared throughout this thesis have had their paths outlined. Hinerangi Hikuroa went home to her parents. She was eighteen and in her words, she had “had enough of touring.” A number of the female members turned to nursing and teaching, while others returned to their deaconess work, including Sister Nicholls and Marama Murimai. Mori Pickering made her way back to Otago to help out on her parent’s farm among other activities. Airini Grennell made history by becoming the first female Maori radio broadcaster in

---

1938. She had a long and fruitful career and is commemorated at Radio New Zealand.\footnote{Airini Grennell gave an interview on her career in the radio industry in 1987, which was aired on Radio New Zealand programme: Whenua on 17 November 1996.}

Some members of the choir continued to perform after the choir disbanded. Inia Te Wiata became a prominent operatic singer in London in the 1950s and 1960s.\footnote{For more details of Inia Te Wiata see Beryl Te Wiata, \textit{A Most Happy Fella} (London: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1976).} Indeed, the choir’s name still held resonance for some years afterwards. At a Ngati-Poneke Young Maori Club Fundraiser, former member, Weno Tahiwi, performed at the charity concert in Wellington to raise money for the new Anglican Cathedral in 1939. Tahiwi had been a member of the 1937-38 touring choir and an advertisement for the concert used the WMC’s previous successes to draw audiences to the event.\footnote{“Maori Concert,” \textit{Evening Post} (3 July 1939), 4.}

Seamer retired from his role as General Superintendent of the Home and Maori Mission Departments in 1939. The challenges of organising a massive international tour, the combination of national church responsibilities and physical strains had taken their toll on his health. At the Conference of February 1939, Seamer retired at the age of sixty-one, but it was resolved that he should be retained for some years as adviser in Maori matters to the new General Superintendent. For a year Seamer lived in Drury, Hamilton where he became acting superintendent of the Waikato-King Country Circuit.\footnote{Laurenson, \textit{Te Hahi Weteriana}, 232-3.} He was awarded a CMG in 1949 by the Queen for outstanding contribution to the welfare of the Maori race.\footnote{C.M.G. stands for Companion to St Michael and St George, which was a British honour established in 1818 to recognise services carried out in British colonies and by diplomats: “Special Investiture for Rev. A. J. Seamer: Work Among Maoris,” Newspaper clipping (c. 1949), Personal Folder on A J Seamer (Auckland: MCNZA); \textit{NZMT} (2 July 1949), 140.} He died in Hamilton in 1963, aged eighty-three.\footnote{Obituary for Reverend A. J. Seamer, \textit{NZMT} (5 October 1963), 211-212. His two children survived him.}

Reverend George Laurenson was the immediate successor to Seamer’s two roles. Although other missionaries and ministers were to take responsibility for the Home and Maori Mission Departments – including touring around New Zealand –
the delegations were never the same without Seamer’s musical leadership. The Waiata Maori Choir never re-formed.

**Conclusion**

Seamer and the WMC became integral to the Methodist mission work in the early twentieth century. They aimed to take their mission work throughout the British world and for the most part were successful. The journey to Britain was full of eye-opening experiences – experiences tinged with some racial conflict, government tensions, exotic cultures, and different musical tastes. The choir became performing tourists, viewing the Mother Country through tourist's eyes, while also imparting a vision of Maori culture on the stage. Maori music and culture was well received by audiences and much interest was generated in their native dances and hakas. However, there was some criticism of the WMC’s performance of English music. Some felt that such music ought to be left to professionals, while others felt it was plain wrong for a young Maori woman to be playing at the piano and singing *Danny Boy*. Mostly, audiences were impressed and amazed at the strength and tone of the Maori voices. Reviewing the tour of Britain, Seamer said, “It would be impossible to imagine a pleasanter or happier party. Although they came from different tribes from all parts of New Zealand, they had co-operated splendidly under their own leaders.”

On reflection some of the members also noted that they were in no doubt of the benefit they received from their travels.

Through their performances on the British stage, the WMC was successful in changing opinions about Maori: “The visit of the choir will certainly result in the binding closer to the Mother Country the native race of New Zealand, of which the Maori Choir are typical representatives.” The musical interaction between the Maori choir and British audiences added a new chapter in the narrative of music history in New Zealand. When the choir returned to New Zealand it marked the end of an era. Never again would the group perform in New Zealand or elsewhere, yet the WMC proved to be an important catalyst for placing New Zealand music and the Maori people into the homes and minds of audiences around the British world.

---

142 Tapu Misa, “Top of the Pops,” 53.
144 “The Waiata Choir: Successful Tour,” The Evening Post (20 April 1938), 11.
I began this thesis by briefly summarizing the state of music history in New Zealand. Placing New Zealand’s musical traditions in the spotlight has revealed that historiography has tended to divide music narratives into two: European music traditions have often been directly and indirectly separated from Maori music traditions. However, what was uncovered by this research was that a historiographical dichotomy exists in stark contrast to the strong thread of hybridised musical traditions between the two cultures since colonisation. The first musical encounters between Maori and European resulted in both groups “mishearing” the cultural purpose attached to the sounds that came from the others’ instrument. This thesis argues that while some encounters ended with bloodshed and others in unresponsiveness, these early events mark the beginning of musical interaction between Pakeha and Maori, spanning over two hundred years of history.

This thesis contributes to our understanding of the hybridised musical traditions that occurred between the two cultures in the 1920s and 1930s. A range of music genres, such as classical, popular, religious, jazz and patriotic styles to name a few, came together in a variety of ways that was a common and expected occurrence in performances during this period. The Methodist Home Mission Party, which then became the Waiata Maori Choir, served as a case study to explore such a diverse music culture and to assess the state of race relations. More specifically, the musical interactions that occurred between Methodists and Maori throughout New Zealand were explored. By investigating music traditions we can gain insight into popular culture, which is perhaps more telling about every-day race relations than Acts of Parliaments and other official documents present during that period.

The repertoire performed by the WMC contributes to our understanding of the vibrancy and shifting nature of New Zealand’s music culture. The religious repertoire they performed was used to illustrate not only Maori progression and embracing of Christianity, but also that hymns and psalms were a beloved style to perform. Familiarity coupled with religious sincerity meant that audiences could relate to the choir. The hymns were interspersed with both English, Maori, German and Welsh languages, which further highlights the hybridism of musical practices that the WMC carried out.
The WMC became proficient in performing Maori to their audiences. They tended to perform less traditionally styled music and more hybridised songs, which incorporated songs from a number of tribes. This fusion of Maori and English music and well as Maori tribal music signals an example in the history of musical encounters between Maori and Pakeha in the twentieth century. In performing a diverse range of music cultures, including classical and operatic styles, instrumentalists and patriotic and nationalistic songs, the WMC testifies to the variety of musical interchange apparent in New Zealand. While other groups were performing in a similar manner, the professionalism and religious focus of this group ensured they continued to have high attendance and were considered valuable contributors in their time.

Another idea at the core of this thesis is the belief that music was fundamental in bringing communities together in New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s. Live performance traditions were reinforced during the economic depression and an emphasis was placed on community themed musical experiences. When the WMC toured throughout New Zealand, their call to raise money for the Home Mission Fund held appeal not only for the entertainment aspect of the music, but for the belief that such groups would be aiding the betterment of communities and Maori with the fundraising for Maori schools.

Musical encounters between Maori and Methodists had a long history that gained momentum by the 1920s and 1930s. Due to the numerous encounters with Maori in the nineteenth century, Methodist musical traditions were adapted and absorbed into Maori life by those who chose to follow Christianity. Although Maori music was not considered musically or technically compatible with European music, the broader characteristics of Methodism were very similar to Maori traditions, including impassioned singing, music adhering to a purpose and strict adherence the lyrics for spiritual uplift, and relaxed performance opportunities, with clear direction for singing. This unobtrusive alignment may have eased the conversion process for some Maori in New Zealand. The changes within religious and Maori music can also be traced to this period. Maori freely adapted religious music to suit their tastes and language, thus emphasising a process of musical hybridisation between European and Maori music.

The WMC offers insight into the importance of individuals within the Methodist Church for instigating change and racial interaction. While I acknowledge
that there are numerous individual missionaries and ministers who played a role in fostering musical encounters between Maori and Pakeha, Reverend Seamer was especially important. His experiences and beliefs in racial interaction aligned with his musical skills when he established the MHMP (WMC) in 1924. Seamer actively used music as a creative method for evangelisation among Maori and he established a long lasting musical institution to supplement the financial and educative endeavours of his departments in the 1920s and 1930s. Seamer used this choir to his advantage by giving expression to his vision for a bicultural New Zealand, one that demonstrated performing together, practicing religion together and living together in harmony as a nation of two people.

The Waiata Maori Choir also throws light on the dynamic tribal formations within New Zealand Maori society. Seamer hoped to bring not only Pakeha and Maori together, but also the diverse affiliations that made up Maori tribes. Seamer privileged a Maori identity over the large number of tribal identities and loyalties by making a pan-tribal performance group. Throughout the fifteen years of the choir’s existence, it garnered support from a range of tribes throughout the country indicating that for many tribes, unity was an important for them. However, not all tribes took part in the choir, including Te Arawa Maori performers who were aligned with the Anglican Reverend Bennett. Of course, one could also argue that those tribes who did offer representatives were still acting on tribal interests. Regardless of the reasons, Seamer overcame the absence of full representation by carefully smoothing this fact over in narrations to audiences, and the choir was emphasised as being representative of all New Zealand Maori in the three countries they toured.

Through the WMC’s extended tours we learn the different attitudes toward music. An investigation of how music was received in each Methodist country leads to some understanding of the different attitudes in the late 1930s. Audiences throughout Australia received the performances of Maori history and culture and the choir’s religious message in mostly positive ways, with expressions of gratitude. The choir found that their educative mission was successful in changing attitudes about Maori during both tours in 1935 and 1937. These responses were in contrast to the apparent lack of similar behaviour towards Aboriginal Australians who were treated as second-class citizens. One reason for the different responses to the two indigenous people could be the perception of Maori as being Christian and progressing towards “civilisation,” which the WMC, as Methodist representatives, openly displayed.
Australian society did not appear to hold any pretence towards musical connoisseurship and took the choir’s narrations and musicianship to be the best representatives from New Zealand Maori at the time.

The tour to Great Britain revealed the differences in musical tastes in comparison to New Zealand. Most audiences were appreciative of the choir’s religious and educative purpose while on tour, and many considered the WMC’s visit a sign of the development of the church across the world. Yet attitudes to music in the United Kingdom revealed the complexity of British society. While in London, the WMC came across people who were critical of their musicianship and their performance of English music. While in Wales, Ireland and places north of London, critics and audiences enjoyed the choir’s performances of hybridised music, Maori music and popular ballads. Such disparity in opinion points to the sensitivity of the outer regions of the UK to different styles of music, while London residents did not share the same openness. In using music as a measuring point for reception, we come closer to understanding how the choir were received and can provide some clues as to why each country and community responded as they did.

The experience of the choir gave opportunities for a selected few to follow careers in performance. Touring no doubt changed the lives of all by being exposed to new sights and people, which enabled them to experience other lifestyles at first hand. The stage provided space for Maori members to earn a place within society as performers and presenters including choir members Inia Te Wiata, Airini Grennell, and Matene Keepa. Rather than carry out the roles expected of them, the choir revealed that music could and did take them to new and unexpected places, as was the case with Grennell when she became the first female Maori broadcaster in New Zealand.\(^1\) Performance of Maori history and culture on the international stage opened pathways for choir members to develop as individuals, as Maori, and as New Zealand citizens who were also part of the British Empire.

The WMC was an important catalyst in placing New Zealand music and the Maori people into the homes and minds of audiences around the British world. The WMC presented Maori singers with the opportunity to take Maori music and culture into new international arenas. While their music was sometimes in a hybridised form, the essence of that culture was still a novel entertainment for foreign audiences. The

international stage then, offered the choir members a typically rapt audience who were eager to learn and hear them perform. The WMC illustrates that some Maori had a part to play in the creation of cross-cultural interaction during the early twentieth century, and indeed musical encounters on the stage was a place to reinforce a vision of harmonious Maori and Pakeha relations.

Music has been used to create a shared cultural memory between two people or more, which is mutually challenged and changed by the other. The WMC emphasised a cultural memory of Maori people, which embodied Methodism, Maori music, and a diverse range of musical genres when they performed around the world. Although music is fleeting in production, the memory of a performance lingers long after the performers have gone, especially if the experience was a positive one (or conversely, negative). The enjoyment of music and the joy of remembering music collectively brought people together and is a factor in considering a country’s symbolism, public image, and the popularity of those ideas in the broader public.

This thesis has thrown up more questions than when research started. It began as an investigation of one choir, yet over time it became apparent that the topic of Maori choirs was a much larger field. Investigating other Maori choral groups, such as Te Puea Herangi’s groups at Ngaruawahia, could contribute to our understanding about the place of music in New Zealand society. More broadly, I believe there is scope for tracing the global interactions of performers and music. The stage may well be a fruitful tool to explore the variations and similarities that occurred with musical traditions across trans-national lines, particularly between the British Empire in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. It would be a topical case study to take the idea of the stage along Ballantyne’s horizontal and vertical lines in the “webs of empire.”

How was music used to assist or resist interaction with indigenous culture and the dominant culture? Within Australia, music might be seen as another site whereby Aborigines were dispossessed and regarded racially inferior, suggesting a connection between music, imperialism, colonialism, and nationalism.

2 Likewise, David Hebert carried out important research on the relationship of the Ratana Church with their musical groups, yet it remains to be seen whether music and performance was a unifying feature in the relationship between Reverend Seamer and Ratana: “Letter from Irene Hobbs to Michael King” (July 23 1975), 6, MS 524 PPHR: Box 155/ 1 (Christchurch: MCNZA).

New Zealand’s music history has a far more complicated narrative than previously thought. Music occupies a grey area in recent histories, yet musical encounters between Maori and Pakeha have a rich history. Riding on the wave of live performance traditions in the period, Seamer and his choir were on a mission to bring harmony to New Zealanders in the 1920s and 1930s. Their use of music as a tool to engage in discourse about the Maori race and their religious cause was a legitimate expression of race relations.

We must not lose sight of the fact that music was a unifying factor for Seamer, the Methodist Church, the Waiata Maori Choir and their audiences. The shared joy in singing and performance brought people together throughout New Zealand, Australia and in Great Britain. The stage was a site that negotiated discourse about Maori, about Methodism and about Maori and Pakeha. The choir sang for their duty as mission workers, yet they found a creative way to sing their faith, to sing it loud, and to share it with others along their fifteen-year journey.
APPENDIX ONE

Membership List of Waiata Maori Choir, 1924 - 1938

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member Name</th>
<th>Main Region</th>
<th>Years involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Tahiwi</td>
<td>Otaki, Kapiti Coast</td>
<td>1937 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airini Grennell</td>
<td>Chatham Islands</td>
<td>1932 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airini Wereta</td>
<td>Chatham Islands</td>
<td>1932 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ane Tangaire</td>
<td>Rangitukia, Gisbourne</td>
<td>1934 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ara Winiata</td>
<td>Hokianga, Northland</td>
<td>1924 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur John Seamer (Revd)</td>
<td>Tongala, Victoria, Australia</td>
<td>1924 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ata Hauuto</td>
<td>Not listed</td>
<td>1928 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ata Kahui</td>
<td>Taranaki</td>
<td>1925 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atareha Kaio</td>
<td>North Auckland</td>
<td>1929 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Tuau</td>
<td>East Coast, North Island</td>
<td>1935 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Teinhi</td>
<td>Not listed</td>
<td>1925 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enoka Tuae</td>
<td>East Coast, Ngati Porou</td>
<td>1937 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eruera Te Tuhi (Revd)</td>
<td>Kaipara, Northland</td>
<td>1924 - 1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Ellison</td>
<td>Macandrew Bay, Otakau</td>
<td>1937 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George West</td>
<td>Muruhiku, Southland</td>
<td>1934 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Mateono</td>
<td>Not listed</td>
<td>1931 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Piriki</td>
<td>Not listed</td>
<td>1926 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henare (Henry) Toka</td>
<td>Not listed</td>
<td>1928 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hikuroa Te Maha</td>
<td>Ratana Pa, Wanganui</td>
<td>1934 - 1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinemoa (Linda) Grennell</td>
<td>Port Levy, Chatham Islands</td>
<td>1935 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinemoa Karemaina</td>
<td>Not listed</td>
<td>1933 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinerangi Hikuroa</td>
<td>Maniapoto, King Country</td>
<td>1928 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinewhareua</td>
<td>Not listed</td>
<td>1929 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hironi Wikirawhi</td>
<td>Rotorua</td>
<td>1935 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hohepa (Joe) Tutawhaio (Revd)</td>
<td>Muruhiku, Otakau</td>
<td>1932 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hori Hauauru</td>
<td>Bluff, Southland</td>
<td>1934 - 1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hone Otenata</td>
<td>Not listed</td>
<td>1929 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hone Wereta</td>
<td>Poneke or Manawatu</td>
<td>1932 - 1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inia Te Wiata</td>
<td>Otaki, Kapiti Coast</td>
<td>1934 - 1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iroriana</td>
<td>Not listed</td>
<td>1924 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Manuera</td>
<td>Patea, Wanganui</td>
<td>1934 - 1935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
K. Tema
Not listed 1928 -

M. W. Rangiheua
Not listed 1928 -
Mano Nicholls
Poneke, Wellington 1929 -
Marama Muriwai (Deaconess)
Hokianga, Northland 1934 - 1938
Margaret W. Nicholls (Deaconess)
Hamilton, Waikato 1928 - 1938
Matene Keepa (Rev)
Hamilton, Waikato 1925 - 1928
Meha Ngawhau
Not listed 1924 -
Mereana Larkins Kaitaia
Northland 1934 - 1938
Mere (Mary) Poishi
Taranaki 1928 -
Mere (Mary) Toka
Not listed 1928 -
Mere (Mary) Waikare
Tikitiki, East Cape 1934 - 1938
Merina Piripi
Not listed 1925 -
Moerua Wapereki
Not listed 1929 -
Mori Ellison (Deaconess until 1941)
Tahu 1927 - 1938

Nere Kingi
Whakatane, Bay of Plenty 1934 -

P. Tikau
Rapaki, Canterbury 1932 -
Paitea Hoka
Not listed 1931 -
Paitea Hoka
Kaipara, Northland 1932 -
Piko Hikuroa (Hinerangi’s father)
Maniapoto, King Country 1928 -
Piria Wanahi
Canterbury 1928 - 1929

R. Hoerua
Thames, Coromandel 1935 -
Raiha Pihama (Te Aho’s daughter)
Raglan, Waikato 1931 - 1935
Rake Hauoto
Huntly, Waikato 1934 -
Rangi Karamaina
Thames, Coromandel 1935 -
Rangi Moerua
King Country 1929 - 1933
Rangi Tawhai
Hokianga, Northland 1931 -1932
Riki Karaka
Waikato 1929 & 1934
Ripeka Karamaina
Hangatiki, Waikato 1934 -
Ripeka Wirikake
Not listed 1928 -
Robert Tahupotiki Haddon (Rev)
Northern Taranaki 1924 - 1936
Rongo (Dolly) Kahui
Rahotu, Taranaki 1924 - 1926
Rua P. Rakena (Rev)
Mangumuka, Northland 1926 -
Ruhi Ruamoetahuna Bishop
Taranaki 1924 -
Rupene Matoe
Okaiawa, Taranaki 1934 - 1938

Taka Ropata (Deaconess until 1934)
Waikanae, Kapiti Coast 1925 - 1938
Tamati Maruera
Nga Puhi 1935 - 1938
Tamati Tepuahi
North Auckland 1934 -
Tame Maihi
Taranaki 1934 -
Tame/Taine Ponui
Kawhia, Waikato 1934 -
Te Aho-o-Te Rangi Pihama
Waikato 1924 - 1932
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Te Ako Pihama (Te Aho's son)</td>
<td>Whatawhata, Waikato</td>
<td>1929 - 1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telleumanao Kerei</td>
<td>Not listed</td>
<td>1929 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Uira (Dave) Tutaeo Manihera</td>
<td>Raglan, Waikato</td>
<td>1931 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tono Tikau Barrett</td>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>1933 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutu Keepa (Matene's son)</td>
<td>Ngaruawahia, Waikato</td>
<td>1934 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U. Woodright</td>
<td>Not listed</td>
<td>1937 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waka Taituha/ka (Leatherly)</td>
<td>Taranaki</td>
<td>1929 - 1931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanairangi</td>
<td>Taranaki</td>
<td>1932 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waru Tohikuri</td>
<td>Taranaki</td>
<td>1934 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weno Tahiwi</td>
<td>Otaki, Kapiti Coast</td>
<td>1935 - 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiremu (William) Nerihana</td>
<td>Not listed</td>
<td>1929 &amp; 1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiremu (William) (Nicholls)</td>
<td>Poneke, Wellington</td>
<td>1929 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiremu (Wiiliam) Perahama</td>
<td>Manawatu, Northland</td>
<td>1929 -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX TWO

### Glossary of Maori to English terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>English Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atua</td>
<td>Maori language equivalent for God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haka</td>
<td>Vigorous posture dance – usually of defiance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hapu</td>
<td>Political and social unit of Maori that ranged in size from 100 – 300 people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hongi</td>
<td>Nose-pressing greeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kainga</td>
<td>Home, settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karakia</td>
<td>Incantation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karanga</td>
<td>Ritual of welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuhiri</td>
<td>Visiting groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pa</td>
<td>Fort, village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>New Zealander of European descent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patere</td>
<td>Historical or Genealogical tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pukaea</td>
<td>Wooden aerophone used to signal threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reweti</td>
<td>Reverend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangata whenua</td>
<td>Local tribes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapu</td>
<td>Sacred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tauparapara</td>
<td>Recitation before speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiki</td>
<td>A neck pendant; fetch; go to do something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tino-Iwi</td>
<td>Central Tribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tohunga</td>
<td>Priest, expert, artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waewae tapu</td>
<td>People with sacred feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiata</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wero</td>
<td>Challenge to the visiting party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whakaaraara pa</td>
<td>Watch song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whakapapa</td>
<td>Ancestral history and line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whariki</td>
<td>Mat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX THREE:  

Timeline

1897 Arthur Seamer enlists as a missionary with the Salvation Army to work among the Maori people in New Zealand

1901 Seamer resigns from his role as Lieutenant in the Salvation Army
Seamer begins his training as a Methodist Church missionary

1907 Seamer is officially ordained as a Minister of the Methodist Church

1920 Seamer becomes General Superintendent of the Maori Mission Department of the Methodist Church

1923 Seamer is elected by Conference to be the first General Superintendent of both the Home and Maori Mission Departments.

1924 Seamer formed the Methodist Maori Mission Party, which begins annual tours of Methodist Circuits throughout New Zealand

1929 Economic Depression severely undermines the well being of most New Zealand communities

1933 Reverend Seamer is President of the Methodist Annual Conference

1934 Name change to Waiata Maori Choir, choir continue touring New Zealand

1935 Waiata Maori Choir makes its first tour to Australia
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Waiata Maori Choir tour New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937/38</td>
<td>The Waiata Maori Choir toured Australia, then head to Great Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Waiata Maori Choir returns to New Zealand and give a final tour around Auckland and Northland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Waiata Maori Choir disbands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Reverend Seamer retires from his role as General Superintendent of Home and Maori Missions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outbreak of World War Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>New Zealand’s Centenary Celebrations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Archival Sources:


Home and Maori Missions Collection. Christchurch: Methodist Church of New Zealand Archive.

Home Mission and Church Extension Collection, Maori Choir Box. Christchurch: Methodist Church of New Zealand Archive.

Nicholls, Sister Margaret Waiata. Personal Papers and Historical Records. MS 531: 160-161. Christchurch: Methodist Church of New Zealand Archive.


Seamer Arthur John Rev. Personal Papers and Historical Records, HIA M. Christchurch: Methodist Church of New Zealand Archive.


Audio Sources:


Newspapers:


*Burra Record.* South Australia: Australia, 1935-1937.


*Ellesmere Guardian,* Christchurch, New Zealand. 1930.


*Hutt News.* Upper Hutt, New Zealand. 1931.


*New Zealand Methodist Times.* 1920-1939.


*Poverty Bay Herald.* Gisborne: New Zealand, 1901.


*Sunday Times.* Perth, Western Australia: Australia, 1937.


The Capricornian. Rockhampton, Queensland: Australia, 1924.


The Evening Post. Wellington, New Zealand, 1920-1940.

The Examiner. Launceston, Tasmania: Australia, 1937.


The Register. Adelaide, South Australia: Australia, 1909.


The Western Argus. Perth, Western Australia: Australia, 1937.


Official Sources:


Sheet Music:


**Visual Resources:**


Moss, Takahoeho Ropata and Joseph Thomas Wallingford. Personal Papers and Historical Records. MS 539: 19/1. Christchurch: Methodist Church of New Zealand Archives.

---

**Secondary Sources**

**Books and Chapters:**


Methodist Church. *Ko te Pukapuka o nga Inoi me era atu Tikanga a te Hahi Meteoriti (Weteriana) nga Himene me nga Hakamareta me era atu Ritenga Hoki o te Hahi*. Ranana, 1927.


**Journal Articles:**


**Unpublished Dissertations:**


Website Articles:


“The BBC History of Innovation.”

