

## Reflections on some issues encountered when combining traditional Māori and Western concert music

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BY MARTIN LODGE

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### Background

*One often arrives at something qualitatively new by uniting two already known but separate domains. (György Ligeti)*

**A** FEW YEARS AGO I began to put into practice a growing interest in how the two main musical traditions of New Zealand might meet more directly and engage. Those two traditions are the Māori and the Western. As a classical composer, I'm particularly interested in the 'classical' Māori tradition, as far as it is known, and the Western classical tradition. One of the pieces arising out of this artistic interest has been *Hau* (2005) for taonga pūoro (traditional Māori instruments) and cello.

### About *Hau*

The concept of *Hau* is indicated by its title, which was suggested to me, and its significance explained, by Tom Roa, a colleague in the Māori Studies Department of Waikato University. *Hau* is a Māori word meaning 'breath' or 'wind', but can also mean 'to strike' or 'to stroke' (not too gently!). In these senses it can be related to the action of playing the cello, from tapping its body through to bowing the strings.

All sounds are carried by *hau*, the air, or wind. But in the Māori language *hau* is also the base word for energy. The phrase *e rere ana te hau* means 'energy flowing'; *kua pau te hau* means 'no more energy'. The musical drama of this piece embodies the ideas suggested by the title.

The work is in two sections but must be played continuously without a break. *Pao, pao, pao* refers to the tapping sounds which open the work, creating rhythm without pitch. This leads imperceptibly into the second section *Tawhirimatea*—voices of the winds. The central climax of the piece comes at the end of a cello and putatara (shell trumpet) section about three quarters of the way through the work. It is broken off by the sudden silence of both instruments, followed by a pause. In contrast, the concluding section of the work may be thought of as a dialogue of the winds of the north, represented by the cello, and those of the south, represented by the taonga pūoro. The breaths of two worlds mingle quietly and harmoniously.

*Hau* is dedicated to the memory of the great historian and man of letters, Michael King (1945-2004).

### Issues

The general field of cross-cultural music is increasingly well traversed by scholars of late. Most of the central controversies are well debated, including:

- tradition and repertoire versus innovation
- control versus freedom
- who owns what?
- collaboration versus appropriation
- the overlapping roles of creator and performer.

Such questions are receiving attention in scholarly debate, but as a composer, I've already made my own decisions about them, to enable artistic practice to move forward.

Although I had had a growing interest in traditional Māori music for some years, and wondered how the taonga pūoro, the traditional Māori instruments, could be engaged with Western instruments, it wasn't until Richard Nunns urged me write some pieces for him that I actually took the plunge and began composing such works.

Richard is an old friend and is now a Research Associate colleague with me at the University of Waikato. I was fortunate to have as another colleague at Waikato University, the outstanding Māori musician Hirini Melbourne, who, until his premature death in 2003, was a leading figure in the revival of traditional Māori music as part of a group called *Haumanu* (literally, 'the breath of birds') along with Richard Nunns, Brian Flintoff and others. Personal friendships with Richard and Hirini, these two outstanding figures in the field of taonga pūoro revival, effectively unlocked the door to another world for me, and permitted passage into new musical regions.

The vital element in embarking on writing *Hau* and pieces like it, repeatedly turned out to be people. In addition to Richard and Hirini, my colleague and friend in the Waikato University Music Department, the cellist James Tennant, was an invaluable presence. James is not only a fine classical player, he is also comfortable as an impro-

viser. Beyond these performers and thinkers, I was also acutely aware of the pioneering artistic work done in this area by composer Gillian Whitehead. Her thoughtful and powerfully imaginative works continue to shine as beacons in every weather.

So the impetus to actually put pen to paper and create a score came from working relationships with outstanding performers. This personal connection with the two musical worlds has been essential. It would not have been possible to compose simply out of an abstract wish to combine Māori and Western instruments. People are the key.

## Differences

*Hau* was the second piece I wrote involving Richard Nunns and James Tennant, so I knew that most of the procedures I had worked out for the first piece, *Toru*, were successful. But I had also become aware of the things one needs to consider in bringing together taonga pūoro and Western classical instruments. The principal differences between the two musics can be summarised in a table:

### Comparison of Western music with traditional Māori instrumental music

Māori	Western
Instruments individualised	Instruments standardised
Instruments all hand crafted	Instrument making largely industrialised
Instruments intended mainly for individual performance	Instruments usually designed to facilitate ensemble performance
Instruments strongly linked in all cases to language, song and social function	Instrument development reflects rise of purely instrumental music since the Baroque
Instruments made entirely from natural materials—wood, stone, bone, leaves, etc	Instruments made from a variety of materials, including natural, but also metals and synthetic compounds
Instruments evolved in an island culture isolated for at least 300 years prior to Tasman's visit in 1642	Instruments the result of thousands of years of constant cultural interchange and refinement
Music bound almost entirely into social and ritual function	Music as a stand-alone and distinct art form with a long standing philosophical basis of theory and speculation deriving from ancient Greek thinking (eg. Pythagoras), as well as social and ritual function
Music and instruments retain cosmological genealogy	Music and instruments largely scientific in concept
Music traditionally has no notation and the tradition is entirely aural, and musical creation improvisatory or ritualised	Music powerfully shaped since the Middle Ages by the development of a viable notation system
Tuning and temperament individual to each instrument	Tuning and temperament increasingly standardised since the Renaissance

Flutes typically have pitch range of about a fourth	Flutes (and all pitched instruments) have wide pitch ranges, usually over several octaves
Essence of musical expression gained through microtonal inflection	Essence of musical expression involves use of scales within octaves

Some of these differences are major. For a composer, probably the most important ones are the questions of improvisation versus notated score, the importance of scales in Western music versus the absence of comparable pitch structures in Māori instrumental music, and non-standardised tunings. What audiences most notice are the different and striking appearance and timbres of the Māori instruments—but these aspects are least likely to cause the composer a headache.

In writing *Toru* and then *Hau* I was told at the outset by Richard Nunns that in playing the taonga pūoro he feels comfortable using only traditional playing techniques. There were to be no 'extended techniques' for the taonga pūoro. On the other hand, James Tennant is entirely comfortable utilising extended cello techniques—provided they do not endanger the well-being of the cello itself! For the composer, this meant the Western instrument had to make a journey towards the sound world of the taonga pūoro, and this is why a sensitive and technically excellent player of the Western instrument is needed. My aim was to move beyond just celebrating the differences of the musical worlds of Māori and Westerner, and to find commonalities and meeting points for engagement.

The second practicality is to specify instrumentation. In *Hau*, the cello was straightforward, knowing, as I did, James's confidence in exploring the instrument. For the taonga pūoro, there is a very wide range of mainly wind and percussion instruments to choose from. I decided to limit the number of instruments used, aiming to have the player move between them just often enough to provide a variety of sound and a sense of forward musical narrative, but not so many that the effect was cluttered or disjointed.

## Notation

To be faithful to the history of the Māori instrumental traditions meant their parts have to be improvised. In any case, Western standard notation is of little practical use in indicating the sounds the instruments really play. On the other hand, being a composer, I was not willing to leave the whole performance solely to free improvisation. The solution has been to devise a new kind of notation which seems to work for these works, or at least, for these performers (see Ex. 1 overleaf)

When I came to devise a viable notation system, I first looked at how Gillian Whitehead had addressed this issue in her work, such as *Hine-Raukatauri* for taonga pūoro and flutes—and saw her solutions were not so different to mine. But I decided that I needed a more flexible way of indicating how the music should go. In the end, I borrowed and adapted the system of 'boxes of musical events' from

II. TAWHIRIMATEA

TO TUTATARA

c. 4'30"

T.P. Putaka Guilds intensity | add multiphonics by vocalising

Vc. Cello improvise darkly on the C string, include microtones. Suggested material for improvisation: Build intensity - - - - -

cello leads

T.P. Tutatara Guild to crescendo include multiphonics fff

Vc. Gradually add all strings as improv. Guilds. Use microtonal, sliding double stops to stimulate

putatara and cello stop abruptly, together!

c. 5'30"

TO SMALL PUTORINO

G.P. Putatara dialogue with cello using edge tones mf dynamics, dim. mp

T.P.

Vc.

Improvise on sustained, very high harmonics only. Microtonal movement. Dialogue with taangaporo. mf mp

c. 6'

TO POROTITI

T.P. Blowing into porotiti, dialogue with cello, dying away to nothing

Vc. Gradually & imperceptibly move to flautando natural notes, including microtones. Dialogue with taangaporo dying away to nothing.

c. 7'

Martin Lodge

Ex. 1: Extract from Martin Lodge's *Hau*

the study score for the well-known *String Quartet* by Witold Lutosławski. This kind of score allows the composer to completely control the macrostructure of the piece, the large scale dramatic shape and flow of events. But at the same time it means the performers have the freedom to create musical detail and line spontaneously. They generate the microstructure afresh in each performance. In *Hau* while some thematic material is suggested for the cello, no notes or rhythms are prescribed for the taonga pūoro. But the score does indicate which Māori instruments are required, when they should be played, and the character of each section.

All this means that a piece like *Hau* is a vague musical artefact until it sounds. Of course, while the score may be relatively non-prescriptive, each time the piece is recorded a version of it is fixed. I don't see any problem with that.

**Whose piece?**

A score like this raises the question of ownership. Whose piece is it? Obviously my role as composer of *Hau* is much less determining of the final musical outcome than it is in the pieces I score out fully—for example, for orchestra. The fabric of *Hau* relies on the creativity of the performers, not just their technical expertise. Does this mean that compositional credit for works like *Hau* should be shared? Shared between myself, as shaper of the macrostructure and narrative, and with the players who summon up the actual

characters and emotions in the drama? Richard and I have discussed this issue several times, and increasingly I am coming to feel that a shared credit for composition could be right. Certainly there's a current philosophical school of thought which considers all music to be an improvised dialogue of one sort or another.<sup>1</sup> This piece, has, though, already been played by Richard with another string player, a violist visiting from America in 2006.<sup>2</sup> Can compositional attribution change with each change in performer line-up? It's a challenging thought, but why not?

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*This article grew out of a presentation made on 9 February 2007 at Victoria University of Wellington at the conference "Tradition/Transformation: composition and ethnomusicology in Asia and the Pacific". The presenters were Richard Nunns, James Tennant and Martin Lodge, the paper concluding with a live performance of Hau. The conference was part of the 2007 Asia Pacific Festival.*

1 Benson, Bruce Ellis. *The improvisation of musical dialogue, a phenomenology of music.* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press 2003)  
 2 Timothy Deighton, based in Pennsylvania

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