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## **Maori Show Bands**

A Tribute to Uncle Danny Robinson

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**Abstract:**

The aim of this research is to ask why Maori show bands are not recognised as New Zealand cultural ambassadors who contributed to the New Zealand music industry on an international scale. Another objective is to investigate their historical significance. The first question suggests that Maori show bands have not been recognised by the NZ music industry. The second question asks what was historically significant about them to suggest why they warrant being officially recognised for their contribution. The focus of the research is on those Maori show bands who decided going overseas to discover new opportunities for performing their unique brand of entertainment was a more viable option than staying in New Zealand. I will attempt to highlight what was significant about the Maori show bands that left New Zealand and differentiate between such entertainers as Sir Howard Morrison and the Quartet and other Maori show bands like the Maori Troubadours, and the Maori Hi Fives. This essay will discuss what they had in common as well as what was different.

What is entertainment? My definition of entertainment is of a person or a group that

creates an environment that makes me laugh, cry, or move through an array of emotions. In Richard Dyer's book titled; *Only entertainment*, He defines entertainment as “ A type of performance produced for profit by a trained, paid group who do nothing else but produce performances... which have the sole (conscious) aim of providing pleasure...” (Dyer, 1992, p. 17). It is specific to contemporary western capitalist culture: musicals, music hall, variety TV spectaculars, pantomime, cabaret-showbiz, in a word. He further suggests that “We often use entertainment broadly interchanging with words such as enjoyable and phrases such as, ‘I like it’. Any cultural product any person likes is for them entertainment, and that entertainment creates a category of responses” (Dyer, 1992, p. 2). Dyer suggests that entertainment is not taken seriously because “It rejects claims of morality, politics and aesthetics in a culture which accords these things a high status” (Dyer, 1992, p. 2 ). An example of a group that used entertainment as a means to create a profit yet were not taken seriously was Te Pou O Mangatawhiri or TPM. Maori and Pakeha alike thought of TPM as simply a side show people, a source of amusement and contempt (King, 1987. p. 122). Billy T James has a definition of entertainment; “Entertainment to me is if I had to put it in a nutshell, it makes people feel good by singing to them, by talking to them, by doing what you do really well to them, to me, that is entertainment” (James, cited in Stevens, 1990a). I believe that Dyer would agree with this definition as he suggests, “Entertainment does not ... however, present models of utopian worlds, rather the utopianism is contained in the feelings it embodies” (Dyer, 1992, p. 18). The indications are that Billy T James definition of entertainment centres on how entertainment impacts on the audience leaving them feeling good. Don Selwyn has a Maori perspective on entertainment that suggests:

Innately we come into this world with it, and I see the images of Tawhiri Matea, Tangaroa, Tane Mahuta, I mean, we look at the Kotuku, we look at the Ruru, we have already identified the quality of difference in a natural form therefore it's very easy to transform that form of communication to each other. I think we are born performers. I don't mean it in a whakahihi (show off) way, we just like to give each other pleasure and enjoyment (Selwyn, cited in Stevens, 1990a).

The next question I would ask is would Dyer agree with this? He does suggest that "It is important to stress the cultural and historical specificity of entertainment" (Dyer, 1992, p. 17). Maori culture's entertainment element became a vehicle for the show bands to highlight Maori cultural distinctiveness within a contemporary context. They blended Maori cultural heritage with contemporary popular music, creating a merger of traditional and modern entertainment, highlighting Maori identity as a brand.

However not all Maori show band entertainers were of Maori descent. John Nicol of the Maori Troubadours was an Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander and Lynn Rogers the female lead singer of the Maori Hi Quins was of European Australian descent. The management teams behind the biggest names in the Maori show band business were European. What this suggests is that Maori show bands recognized early that to be successful on an international stage, they had to collaborate and enlist the support of people who had the business savvy enabling them to reach their goals. These people happened to be of other cultures. Neither did Maori show bands exclusively feature Maori culture in their cabaret performances, but rather an assortment of Polynesian cultures that also included Cook Islands and Hawaiian (Peters, 2005, p. 131). The same can be said for the style of music that they played. Not content to stick with only

the popular genres of the day such as rock n roll, they also performed multiple genres such as Mexican, Hawaiian, and country and western genres (Stevens 1990c).

Maori show bands of the 1960s and 1970s also included Motown, disco, funk and soul music (*Show band Aotearoa*, 2008). Dyer discusses the contradictory nature of entertainment. “By adding variety to entertainment the essential contradiction was between comedy and music” (Dyer, 1992, p. 25). There were also elements of contradictions in Maori show band performance with the aim to create variety. “We would start with dinner music while the audience are having a meal and a drink, then we would begin the show with comedy and cultural dances and then later on we would go full on into dance band mode, sometimes we may chop and change things around but only to keep audiences captivated” ( Paul, 2008). What is clear about Maori show bands adding variety to their shows is that they wanted to create enjoyment, laughter, to fixate the audience with their talents. Variety added that change to keep the audience interested steering them away from monotony.

Once variety was established in their list of numbers, they began looking for venues to play at. The venues in New Zealand were limited. It cost money to travel from venue to venue playing against other Maori show bands for prize money at the talent quests, as this was the only form of payment they got at this time. Another issue that became apparent is that in some areas of New Zealand Maori show bands were not valued, home grown talent wasn't appreciated, and became subject to derision. The impact of racist slurs and being ignored by average NZers including the music industry made Maori show bands look for other avenues and opportunities to perform. (Stevens, 1990c). They began making their way to Australia because it was financially viable and an opportunity to entertain and display their own brand of

performance. “There were very few places where we could entertain and make a living is why we all left for Australia” (Rangi Parker, The Shevelles, cited in Stevens 1990e). “We had no money but we thought we were superstars, we did 9000 shows a week and thought we owned the world” (Robbie Ratana cited in Stevens 1990a). “Sydney, bright lights, big city where the roads were paved with gold” (Nuki Waka cited in Peters, 2008). This attitude was indicative of most Maori show bands that travelled to Australia looking for new opportunities (Stevens, 1990b).

We would be decked out in these three hundred dollar suits, walk around Kings Cross Sydney, then we would perform our hearts out on stage and then all come off after the performance and share one pie between four of us (Terry Sorenson, cited in Stevens, 1990a).

There were also times when some show bands had to be reminded of the talent they brought to the entertainment industry.

Sometimes we New Zealander’s are the hardest knockers of all. Only a few weeks before Frank Sinatra was playing before us at the Sheraton Waikiki in Hawaii and all the sound crew and technical staff at the Sheraton Waikiki were saying what a great show we did. I said you’ve got to be kidding; you had Frank Sinatra here just a few weeks before. They said, different show my friend, what you guys introduced was not only the contemporary music but your own culture and I’ve never forgotten that (Ron Smith cited in Stevens 1990e).

This feedback is an indication of the uniqueness Maori show bands brought to the international entertainment circuit. It also touches on the position of average NZers

both Pakeha and Maori who down played the value of Maori show band talent both nationally and internationally (Stevens, 1990c). Australia seemed to be the place where opportunities to perform were in abundance. “This invasion of Maori musicians to Sydney lasted from the late 50’s to the late 80’s and even to the present day starting with a few dozen that became hundreds” (Nuki Waka, Maori Volcanics, cited in Peters 2008). Due to that fact that in the 1950s and 1960s Maori show bands that went overseas became invisible to the New Zealand public the indications are that most NZers were not privy to documented activities of the Maori show bands and their achievements. Further indications suggest that Maori show band members realized it was a marketable product after watching the success of the Maori Troubadours and the Maori Hi Five’s at an international level. “Maori show bands became so popular in Australia that promoters from overseas began signing up Maori show bands without seeing them perform” (Cited in Stevens 1990c).

### Maori music pre colonization:

Music has always been an integral part of Maori societal infrastructure. There are many different aspects that support, complement and enhance the construction and composition of music within a Maori worldview, whose paradigm takes into account the gods, ancestors, genealogy, spiritual realms, the physical aspects and their environment. These are indicative in many forms of composition and performance that include various, karakia, waiata and waiata tawhito or traditional chants and haka. In defining what haka is, Alan Armstrong has written a descriptive version.

The haka is a composition played by many instruments. Hand, feet, legs, body, voice, tongue and eyes all play their part in blending together to

convey in their fullness the challenge, welcome, exhalation, defiance or contempt of the words. It is disciplined yet emotional. More than any other aspect of Maori culture, this complex dance is an expression of the passion, vigor and identity of the race. It is at best, truly a message of the soul expressed by words and posture (Armstrong, cited in Karetu, 1994, p. 25).

Maori music is distinctive to Aotearoa/ New Zealand and shapes the fabric of characteristics associated with Maori identity. Another characteristic that is apparent across all cultural ethnicities is that “Our identity is constructed out of the discourses culturally available to us” (Burr, 2005, p.106). Early European explorers aboard Captain Cook’s ship the Endeavour commented on the skill level of Maori singing.

That the natives did sing in parts, and that although their knowledge was far from scientific, and depended wholly on the delicacy of the ear which they possess, their songs were both pleasing and eloquent is confirmed by the testimony of subsequent voyagers and resident missionaries (Burney, cited in Anderson, 1934, p. 424).

On 4<sup>th</sup> May, 1769, Parkinson another sailor aboard Captain James Cook’s ship wrote:

A song not altogether unlike this, they sometimes sing without the dance, and as a peaceable amusement: they have also others songs which are sung by women, whose voices are remarkably mellow and soft, and have a pleasing and tender effect; the time is slow and the cadence mournful; especially as it appeared to us, who were none of us much acquainted with



music as a science, to be sung in parts; it was at least sung by many voices at the same time (Parkinson, cited in Anderson, 1934, p. 196).

These are some examples that indicate that Maori living communally on their Marae existed in a world of music, for history, for learning specific things, for performance, for rituals and for fun. The indications are that this was a practise passed down through the generations. “Maori culture is steeped in music, everything is done around music. We didn’t have a written culture, but it was passed along in song and action song and the whole history of it was music” (Frankie Stevens, cited in Stevens, 1990a).

## Maori & Pakeha Relations:

The relationship between Maori and Pakeha during the 1950s and 1960s was limited. Various forms of Racism existed at this time. The Hunn report 1961 which was an assessment of the Maori Affairs department stipulated by Jack Hunn endorsed speeding up the process of assimilation of Maori into western society. “Although it was strictly speaking a review of the department of Maori Affairs, it made more far-reaching recommendations on social reforms affecting the Maori people” (Meredith, 2008). What this last statement indicates is the level of societal and institutional racism displayed at this point in time.

The Government overwhelmingly Pakeha in membership and outlook pursued an official policy of assimilation. Most Pakeha took it for granted that their culture was more advanced in every way, in economic organisation and technology, in law, religion and manners. Land and

education policies were aimed at releasing Maori from their land, their language, and their tribe fitting them for full participation in social and economic life (Metge, 2004, p. 303).

The process of assimilation was to have a far greater impact on Maori in terms of tribal connections and identity. Maori that moved away from their rural roots became urbanised losing their connection to tribal affiliations.

Like many Maori, my family was not immersed in the richness of Maori culture either because one parent was Pakeha or often as a nod to the changing times, the perceived need to assimilate into Pakeha society. Many Maori drifted from a rural life into the towns and cities leaving behind their language and customs, sometimes to be lost for generations (Peters & George, 2005, p. 15).

In 1994 The Whanau O Waipareira Trust made a claim to the Waitangi Tribunal for recognition as a legitimate representative of urban Maori. Subsequently there were law changes allowing the trust to assume welfare responsibilities from government agencies. “This case heralded a change in the way the government viewed urban Maori authorities” (Meredith, 2008). The indications are that New Zealand was not as broad minded and open to discourse and debate as today. Another issue that resulted in Maori moving from the rural areas to the cities is that it left Maori land unattended and subjected to rates. “As unpaid rates accumulated local bodies sought payment by getting court orders under section 81 of the act and selling or leasing the land to Pakeha farmers” (Walker, 1990, p. 212). The Hunn report was one of those methodologies and mechanisms utilised to strip Maori of their cultural identity, of their cultural practices, and ways of being. The language as a result almost became

extinct. One of the underlying factors that impacted on Maori cultural identity indicated that Maori cultural paradigm was not valued, was considered inferior, and did not fit into a western worldview.

## History of Maori show bands:



*Te Pou Mangatawhiri Kapa haka group & band, December 1922: (King, 1987, p. 120 & 122).*

One of the earliest groups known to perform and combine contemporary music with Kapa haka was called Te Pou O Mangatawhiri. In the Waikato during the influenza epidemic in 1918 that lasted from approximately October to December 1918. Many Maori parents died leaving children orphaned, homeless, abandoned and destitute. (King, 1987, p.99). Te Puea visited all the settlements between Mangatawhiri and the Waikato heads and gathered up all the children orphaned in the epidemic, it numbered just over 100 of them ( King, 1987, p. 101). The children were taken under her wing and were looked after by both her and the surviving adults. During the depression they were sent out into the European farms during the day to work for pennies milking cows and cutting scrub bushes (King, 1987, p. 118). The money was used to feed the community and among other things purchase musical instruments and clothing. During the night they would practice on their instruments. In 1921 Te Pou O Mangatawhiri or TPM was formed and created in two parts. One side of the group performed Kapa haka and the other half were a band that played an assortment of

instruments. In 1923 the concert party travelled throughout the Waikato district either by train or foot finally ending up in Auckland then carrying on up north as far as the Hokianga harbour (King, 1987, p. 120). One of the concert reviews from the *Northern Advocate* in Whangarei stated: “The concert party was really first rate...it includes men’s haka parties, women’s poi’s and Hawaiian hula dance’s and a dozen little Maori maids whose charming dancing was one of the most popular features of the show. There was a fine string band consisting of steel guitars, mandolins, mandolas, banjos and the popular Hawaiian ukuleles. The stage was set as a typical pa and the use of pungas and nikau in the decorative effect gave the whole performance a pleasing harmony” (King, 1987, p. 120). What makes this significant to Maori show bands is that this was the first recorded blending of both Maori culture and contemporary music and an indication of what was to come in the near future for Maori music. The impact of these concerts created two benefits beyond the immediate aim of raising money. “It upraised the morale of the group that traveled and performed in TPM spilling over into other projects. Secondly they were responsible for a resurgence of interest in Maori music and action songs in many of the Maori districts they visited” (King, 1987, p. 121). In the 1950s there was another resurgence of Maori concert parties similar to TPM travelling around New Zealand. Maori concert parties at this time were considered one of the first steps in the high profile world of show bands because of the novelty for those who had not seen a concert party outside of Rotorua (Stevens, 1990c). In 1954 the Te Awapuni Maori concert party from Hastings had formed and began traveling to the south Island gaining favorable reviews (Stevens, 1990c). They focused national attention on the depth of Maori skill at performance and stage presentation. What was significant about this group is that European entrepreneur Benny Levin got involved who in

adding his business skills and management know how included Howard Morrison and the Clive Trio adding variety to the Maori concert party. What was significant about this group was their combining of the traditional Maori as well as the contemporary music of the day making them more successful than those that did not. The indications are that the model the Te Awapuni concert party used was soon to be replicated in the Maori Show band era. “If we don’t accept change we become stagnant and if we become stagnant it’s going to ruin everything in Maori culture. I think the blending of the old and the new must be encouraged “ (Sir Kingi Ihaka, cited in Stevens, 1990c).

### Auckland Maori Community Centre:



Maori show bands and crowd performing at the Maori Community Centre: (Stevens, 1990b).

In the 1950’s dance halls became popular (Stevens, 1990c). One specific dance hall that stood out was the Maori Community Centre in Auckland situated along the water front. “The community centre held concerts on Friday and Saturday nights and on Sundays teenage afternoons were popular” (Auckland Maori Community Centre, 1962, p. 26). “The Maori community Centre was the main Marae in Auckland at the time if you wanted to find a Maori; you would find them here every Sunday” (Dilworth Karaka, Herbs, cited in Stevens, 1990b). Maori families that came looking

for jobs in Auckland city left behind their rural ties yet yearned for a Marae where they could still have a whanau ( family) like atmosphere, and the Auckland Maori Community Centre became that place. “What I learnt from the Maori Community Centre was timing, slickness, being positive, learning how to dress up and be an entertainer in terms of showmanship, this has stood me in good stead since” (Charlie Tumahai, Herbs, cited in Stevens, 1990b).

Most of those performing in the bands came from rural backgrounds with very little money or resources. Toko Pompey of the Maori Premiers remembers that “It was a life away from Taumaranui. I worked at a saw mill located in the bush with the possums, and I had an offer to go play saxophone in Australia” (Stevens, 1990a).

Danny Robinson relied on his family for support as money was tight. His grandfather Nani Pa Te Ratana Paparoa would hire a truck to take him and the band all over the country. Danny’s younger sisters also supported him by ironing his stage clothes and polishing his shoes so that he would look spick and span when he stepped on to the stage (*Gold Coast Weekend Bulletin*, May 17-18 2008, p. A1).



*The Hawaiian Swingsters*

Ray Paparoa, Simon Reihana, Danny Robinson, Doug Young, Paul Robinson, Nani Pa Paparoa.

During Danny's performing days at the Maori Community Centre, Danny Robinson, Paul Robinson, Ray Paparoa and drummer 12 year old Doug Young formed the Hawaiian Swingsters (Peters, 2008). Danny later formed the Maori Castaways and moved to Australia. "He toured the world with the Maori Hi Fives appearing with the Rolling Stones in Singapore, the Beatles in the ABC theatres in Blackpool appearing live on television in England" (Wendt & Patrick, 1978). "He has also appeared with Tom Jones, Des O'Connor, Mat Munroe, Cilla Black and Val Doonican" (*Gold Coast Weekend Bulletin*, May 17-18 2008, p. A1). The Maori Community Centre launched the careers of most of the Maori show bands entertainers (*Auckland Maori community centre*, 1962, p. 29); (Stevens, 1990b). they ended up overseas, not only in Australia, but also Las Vegas USA, Chicago, New York, Bahamas, London, Guam, Okinawa, Vietnam, Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, German, Sweden, Spain, France, Portugal, and Hawaii as well as other Pacific countries (*Show band Aotearoa*, 2008).



*The Maori Castaways (Manawa music, 2002)*

## Prince Tui Teka:



*Prince Tui Teka (Last, 2008)*

Prince Tui Teka is one of the founding fathers of the Maori show band era who created the first official Maori show band. His success could be based on his tribal roots and family influences (Stevens, 1990a). He was raised in a family that to be musically inclined was a normal part of growing up. In 1952 at the age of fifteen he ran away from home and went to Australia to join and perform in a circus. As a lone Maori entertainer in the circus he was cast in the role of a noble savage (Stevens, 1990a). This was Tui's first exposure to the Australian public and their acceptance and appreciation of Maori culture delivered within a contemporary musical and comedy context. Indications suggest that he very early perceived its economic potential. "Tui was street smart, content to play along with the roles given to the lone Polynesian, mainly in Pakeha acts while soaking up the atmosphere, learning the trade of the entertainment industry" (Peters, 2005, p.38). In 1958 he formed the Maori Troubadours with Mat Tinana, and an Australian aboriginal native named John Nicol, and later another Australian Neville Turner joined playing drums (Stevens, 1990b). Their combination of Maori humor, contemporary music and Kapa haka became part of their brand. The Maori Troubadours were the first official Maori show band (Cited in *Show band Aotearoa*, 2008) contributing to a period that later became known and defined as the Maori show band era (Stevens, 1990b).



## Organizing a Maori Show band:



*Charles Mather with Inia Te Wiata and the Maori Hi Quins (Manawa music, 2002.)*

The most successful Maori show bands belonged to the Maori Hi Fives company that was formed in Australia in 1959. The Maori Hi Fives company was run under the direction of Charlie Mather an Englishman and the general manager along with Jim Anderson. All other Maori show bands that belonged to the Maori Hi Fives company were branded with their name for example, The Maori Hi Fives show band, the Maori Hi Quinns (Paul, 2008). “They disciplined the groups in how to perform and entertain in cabaret so that the entertainers gained that important show band x factor” (Stevens,1990b). Some of the main characteristics drummed into the Maori Hi Fives show band and Maori Hi Quins show band was discipline, professionalism and integrity (Paul, 2008). “The Maori Hi Fives company had a vision of performing in Las Vegas USA as one of their main goals and the Maori Hi Fives management knew that to get there we had to be of world class and world standard” ( Paul, 2008). “It was strict and a person got fined a pound a minute for being late. We would be fined 5 pounds if we’re not smiling on stage. I soon learnt to get things right, and to take notice of what I’m being told. It was for the benefit of the group. We were reminded we were ambassadors of Maori music so we had to live right, present ourselves well, and behave in a professional manner” (Rim D Paul, Maori Hi Quins, cited in 1990b).



*: The Maori High Fives (Stevens,1990c).*

In 1959 the Maori Hi Fives Maori show band began spearheading the Maori show band brand while performing in Australia (Peters, 2008). The Maori Hi Fives achieved phenomenal success by 1963 performing in Australia, Europe and the US. They started off from rock n roll beginnings and began to master a stunning cabaret act that made them the most successful and professional Maori show band at this time (Stevens, 1990c). The reviews of the Maori Hi Fives give testament to their skill professionalism, talent and popularity (Stevens, 1990c). They performed for Walt Disney who was so blown away by their skill and their flamboyant display of performance and musicianship that they were signed to him (Stevens, 1990c). The world press reviews of the Maori Hi Fives stated that they were destined to top the hit parade of stage attractions for 1963 in the US (Stevens, 1990b). The Maori Hi Fives were to set the benchmark for the Maori show band community. “However, not all the groups had the same foresight or the same discipline and professionalism” (Paul, 2008).



*Lynn Rogers and the Maori Hi Quins: ( Peters & George, 2005, p 57).*

The Maori Hi Quins were another very highly successful group that were also part of the Maori Hi Fives company and the second group to follow behind the successful Maori Hi Fives show band. Lynn Rogers, a European Australian was the lead singer of the Maori Hi Quins and was believed to have lifted the group to another level in comparison to other Maori show bands with her singing and performance talent as well as her overall popularity (Peters, 2005, p. 57). Lynn Rogers and the Maori Hi Quins went on to become the toast of Europe (Peters, 2008).

I was singing Pop music when Rim D Paul came in and asked would you like to join a Maori show band? Once I joined the Maori Hi Quins I thought, this is the best thing to ever happen to me. We worked at the Ritz then toured Europe, the US and Canada travelling all over the world. For three years, I was protected by seven beautiful Maori men. I was only seventeen at the time and an experience I will never forget (Rogers, cited in Peters, 2008).

Lynn showed courage to do something out of her comfort zone, embracing and enhancing the Maori Hi Quins with her own talent creating a unique blend of entertainment that gave them an edge internationally.

## Typical Band Line up:



*The Maori Volcanics: (Peters & George, 2005, .p 147).*

The most successful Maori show bands had one female lead singer and between five to seven males. Each person in the group was a solo entertainer in their own right and had a role to play. The groups worked to what their strengths were based on the aptitude of the performers (Paul, 2008). “Who was involved in each line up tended to change because bands were disbanding and re grouping all the time” (Stevens, 1990b). The Maori Volcanics debuted in 1965. The original line up was Matt Kemp (lead guitar), John Clarke Gimmick (drums), Nuki Waka (rhythm guitar), Hector Epae (vocals and impressions), Gugi Waka (bass guitar), and Mahora (vocals and dance) (Peters, 2005, p. 59). “The first hurdle the new show band faced was Gugi the new bass player couldn’t actually play the bass. He saw this as a temporary setback and soon headed out to buy a bass guitar and amplifier and disciplined himself to practise” (Peters, 2005, p. 60). The actual performance on musical instruments or on the microphone depended in most cases on the talent available (Paul, 2008). One thing that is apparent is that there were no female only Maori show bands. The Yandall sisters came close and so did the Shevelles yet although both female groups were entertainers, they were either backed by a band or sang backing vocals for other entertainers.

## Music:



*Maori Hi Fives 1961: (Te papa, 2004).*

Maori show band musicians spent many hours mastering a multitude of instruments around family and neighbourhood parties. Most musicians at the time learnt and mastered the instruments by ear (Peters, 2005, p. 34). Billy T James discusses how Maori had the uncanny knack of fitting 100 songs into one groove which he considers is a talent in itself. “Songs like ‘The Impossible Dream’, and ‘Knock Three Times’ could fit into the Maori strum” (James, cited in Stevens, 1990d). The Maori strum can be defined as a series of strums whose origins began in the kapa haka Maori Concert parties that was incorporated into a multitude of genres. This strum has been distinctly associated with Maori guitarists (Stevens, 1990d). Although most Maori favored the guitar, there were others that could play a range of musical instruments. “This is where the Quintiki’s excelled, they could do most things on the piano, bass sax and drums, they could play all those instruments so it was easy for us to swap around and make those changes smoothly and people wouldn’t know the difference” (Paul, 2008). Toko Pompey discusses the more flamboyant aspects of Maori show band musicianship differentiating between European entertainers, African American entertainers, and the Maori entertainers.

We could never play like anybody else we could only play like Maoris. The African American entertainers can only play like themselves; the European entertainers can only play like themselves. The Maori entertainers had their own style. They would get three saxophones playing together and then the voices would blend and then the guitars would be going. When you got a bit better, you could play the saxophone behind your back, others played the guitar over their heads, and the clever ones played with their teeth, it was just the sheer Maori-ness of it all (Pompey, cited in Stevens, 1990d).

In terms of learning new material most of the groups did not have much opportunity to keep up with a lot of the music that was coming out of the states as they were constantly moving from venue to venue fulfilling contracts.

Friends would send us new material to learn. Although we learnt the song we didn't copy it the same way it was on the record we reorganized the song to the way that suited our style, based on the talent we had at the time as well as the instruments available. "We knew what our strengths were and re arranged the song to suit it for example we may sometimes even change the genre of the song from pop, to Latin American (Paul, 2008).

The indications are that re arrangements of covers versions was practiced through the Maori show band community with each band playing a particular song yet each version sounding quite unique. When the different Maori show bands were in Sydney they would go and watch each other's performances, and sometimes feature as guest

artists with the resident Maori show band. Sometimes you may have had members from all the different Maori show bands at the same time performing.

Any Maori show band member could fit into any Maori show band and entertain. If Toko Pompey was sick I could fit into his position, I couldn't play the saxophone, but at least I would look good (Ratana cited in Stevens, 1990a).

The Maori show band community in Australia were small but close continuing to whanaungatanga or re connect each time a different Maori show band came into their area. The Maori show bands had what they called a showies code that meant if any band got into trouble, all the other show bands would come and help out (Peters, 2005, p. 41).



*The Sun Downers (Manawa music,2002.)*

## Comedy:



*Fig 13: Tui Teka & Hector Epae (Peters & George, 2005, p.90).*

Prince Tui Teka and Hector Epae were two of the most renowned comedians of the Maori show band era. “Tui and Hector together were a knock out and the best thing about it was that they never trod on each other’s space. They respected each other’s talent. Tui had his acts and Hector had his and with the new line- up the show really was a knockout” (Peters & George, 2005, p. 68). In 1975 Billy T James joined the Maori Volcanics performing with Prince Tui Teka and Hector Epae eventually replacing them (Peters & George 2005, p. 187). Indications are that other Maori show bands also had their methods for creating comedy. “One of our guys was a comedian, that was Gary our drummer, we knew how to support him, we knew how to be funny on our own kind of thing in our own way with our own personalities, yet not every one is a funny person but we would help each other with the act or the skit or whatever it was” ( Paul, 2008). This component suggests that comedy is a specialised area and to have this aspect in a Maori show band could enhance their ability to promote themselves and provide variety in their line up.



## Improvisation:



*The Hawaiian Swingsters: (Manawa music, 2002).*

Improvisation is another feature often called for in a performance as either electrical equipment had failed or the lights had gone out, or some issue that was beyond the control of the band surfaced and sometimes it was for pure entertainment. “I can tell you of a time it was a Miss New Zealand competition in Blenheim. During the show there was a power cut and the Quintiki’s were performing. We put down our instruments and went into a haka. Gary doing his thing was clowning around and we spontaneously played off each other (Paul, 2008). In the 1960’s Howard Morrison had the Quintiki’s as a backing band for his shows and there were times when Howard’s improvisation with the band tended to backfire on him in front of the audience. “Howard was afraid of the Quintikis. He didn’t know what we’d get up to because any one of us in the group would do something and the rest would back each other’s play, we didn’t do it to upstage him, but when he was in a cheeky mood, and if he was picking on any of us the others would back up their mate and turn it around” ( Paul, 2008).

Another example of improvisation was with the Maori Volcanics who were performing in Tokyo at a night club called the Copacabana.

We had put our gear on a bottom circular stage that rose from the floor below into the main night club arena above us. Unfortunately as the stage began to raise the boys dressed in their piupius began doing a haka that dislodged the stage which then stopped half way. Next minute the whole nightclub began peering over the side at us stuck and in a quite predicament. The whole night club started laughing at our misfortune when instantly we broke into an instrumental of in the mood and the club started to swing. Fifteen minutes later engineers got the stage fixed and it began rising to its natural level receiving rapturous applause from the audience (Peters, 2005, p. 75).

The Maori Volcanics were a Maori show band that could do an entire set on improvisation. The entertainment factor created unexpectedness not only with the audience but with each other. Nuki Waka, the leader of the Maori Volcanics believed the secret to their methodology was surprise by changing the pace and changing the rhythm (Peters, 2005, p.90).



*The Quintikis: ((Manawa music, 2002).*

## Venues and Audiences:



*The Sheratons: (Manawa music, 2002).*

The venues Maori show bands performed in were wide and varied. The Asia circuit included a stint in Vietnam during the war entertaining both the New Zealand and American troops. The Maori Volcanics shared some of their experiences in Vietnam. “I will always remember our farewell from the camp as the men stripped to the waist lined up along the route to the helicopter pad and performed a haka for us” (Peters, 2005, p. 99). Some areas and venues the Maori show bands performed at were potentially very dangerous, as Lenny Ormsby explains during one of the Maori Tikiwis gigs they performed in Vietnam.

I made a complaint to the management. I asked can you get us four tickets on the earliest flight back to Australia. The general manager asked what the problem was. I said, we got shot at and we want to go home. He said, you’ve got a client and three more months on your contract, you’ve got nothing to complain about, I’ve got something to complain about, he took us out back and showed us his car that had five new bullet holes in it from that week” (Ormsby, cited in Stevens, 1990d).

Other issues came to the fore in terms of cultural difference for the Maori Volcanic's while they were in Thailand.

Our manager arranged for us to do a show for the Thai Royal family. We opened with some Maori culture. We performed our Maori opener and rushed backstage for a quick change, except when we went to go back on stage the police surrounded us and would not allow us back on. We finally had someone interpret the issue for us, and we discovered it was an insult to the King and Queen to expose an uncovered torso as the boys had done" (Peters & George 2005, p. 86).

That was one example of what happens when a Maori show band does not check out the customs and tikanga or practices of another indigenous culture while in their whenua or country. Miscommunication and aggrieved offences can manifest as a result. This incident is not indicative of usual practice as it was a one off performance. Most show bands are experienced enough to read their audience and make judgment calls based on how the performance is going.

Part of being professional is that you learn to read your audience to ascertain what goes down well and what doesn't go down well with an audience and constantly changing your program to suit the occasion, some times we got so bored doing the same old number that we would throw it out and put something else in, if that didn't work we put it back in again (Paul, 2008).

Incidents such as these were not typical of the venues and places Maori show bands played. Some Maori show bands found their hardest audiences to please were in New Zealand. Maori audiences were the hardest audiences, especially for those Maori show bands who had been away from NZ for a long period. “Over in Australia, we started to pick things up from other musicians and recording artists and developing our own skills and performance, when we came back to New Zealand we had grown in our music ability and taste but the audiences back in NZ were still going for the beat and the dance hall mode, bands that had played internationally were beyond that and it was hard at times to adjust to what was required (Paul, 2008). This wasn’t indicative of all Maori show bands; The Maori Volcanics continued to have a strong fan base when they performed in New Zealand despite being based in Australia.

### Show band Aotearoa 2008:



*The band & cast:( Show band Aotearoa 2008)*

In December 4<sup>th</sup> 2004 Te Papa museum in Wellington began an online exhibition about the Maori show bands and some of their exploits around the world. This motivated many of the old entertainers to get back together for a concert at the Museum in Wellington (Cited in Maori show bands, Te Papa, 2008). “This inspired me to want to recreate the Maori show band story again teaching the skills professionalism and discipline of the Maori show band era in a musical theatre context to a younger generation” (Paul, 2008). John Broughton wrote the play and with Rim D Paul held auditions enlisting a cast of seventy students from Rotorua Boys High School and Rotorua Girls High School. Rim D Paul set about arranging the music with John Broughton writing some of the original compositions. In June 30<sup>th</sup> 2008 Show band Aotearoa; the musical was launched (*Show band Aotearoa*, 2008). This is a good example of Maori show band entertainers sharing their knowledge in a manner that could benefit younger musicians of today. As a result, one former band member of Show band Aotearoa is currently studying for a Bachelor degree in commercial music at Waikato Institute of Technology. What is so significant about this achievement is that when the Maori show bands first started out in the 1950s and 1960s it was during a time when Pakeha tolerance for anything Maori was minimal. In 2008 the spectrum has come full circle where new generations of both Maori musicians and non Maori musicians are being informed about the stories behind the Maori show band era and performing this medium for the general public in the form of a musical. What is clear from this dissertation is the emphasis Maori show bands put on live performance. In the 1950s and 1960s live performance was standard practice and bands could get away with not having to record music. However, in 2009 this practice has taken a back seat to technology, and current

practises of the music industry. Dover Samuels talks about the impact of these current practices.

Live entertainment is underestimated, underfunded and under recognized in New Zealand, but if you have a look at the professions and those who have the venues to be able to recognize this, and turn it back into a commercial product with a Maori flavour, the whole cycle could evolve and start again (Samuels, cited in Peters, 2008).

Music in its current context is a commodity based on capitalist expectations. Rather than performing live music, It is far easier to record in a studio and move volumes of product globally through the making of compact disks, ready for distribution, or moving music through web sites like <http://www.sellaband.com/>. One of the impacts of this is that the entertainment x factor of the Maori show band entertainers in the 1950s and 1960s is not evident in most current Maori musicians.



*The Maori Cavaliers 1965: (Manawa music, 2002).*

## Conclusion:

This dissertation has highlighted that the Maori show band era has a genesis and a genealogy pre colonisation, and that even then, Maori talent for music was recognised. It discovered that entertainment was defined as a type of performance produced for profit and utilised as a means to bring a disenfranchised people together, despite the discriminatory practises the colonial governments were engaged in to undermine and keep Maori subjugated. That further resurgences in Maori cultural performances, practises and belief systems reconnected urbanised Maori, to their cultural identity blending both traditional and contemporary music. That on a national level, the Maori show band era brought whole Maori communities together from around the country converging on the Auckland Community Centre, known throughout the nation as Auckland's main Marae. On an international level the Maori show bands exposed their aptitude for performance to the international market, making potential entrepreneurs take notice of talent coming out of New Zealand. Another factor is that the Maori Volcanics are still currently entertaining internationally, and they still currently have original members in their line up.

Sir Howard Morrison was part of a quartet who later went solo in his career. He is well respected and acknowledged because he was established, and visible in New Zealand. The life span of Howard Morrison and the Quartet spanned from 1960 to 1963 (Steven, 1990a). What Sir Howard Morrison has in common with other Maori show bands is that his career started at the same time. He was another budding entertainer back in the 1950s that made his way to the Maori community centre in Auckland to perform and learn the entertainment trade. What was different about Sir



Howard Morrison and the other groups is that he is not considered Maori show band material, he is a Maori entertainer. Maori show band members are defined as multi instrumentalists that could also sing and act and do comedies as well as Maori culture (Peters, 2008). He never played his own instruments. The Maori show bands that went overseas entertained on a much grander scale yet most of them are not recognised at all for their contribution and services to NZ music. The research that I have done suggests that what they achieved was phenomenal and significant enough is why they should be acknowledged. I support and strongly encourage the NZ music industry to enter them into the New Zealand music hall of fame, and be acknowledged like Sir Howard Morrison has been.

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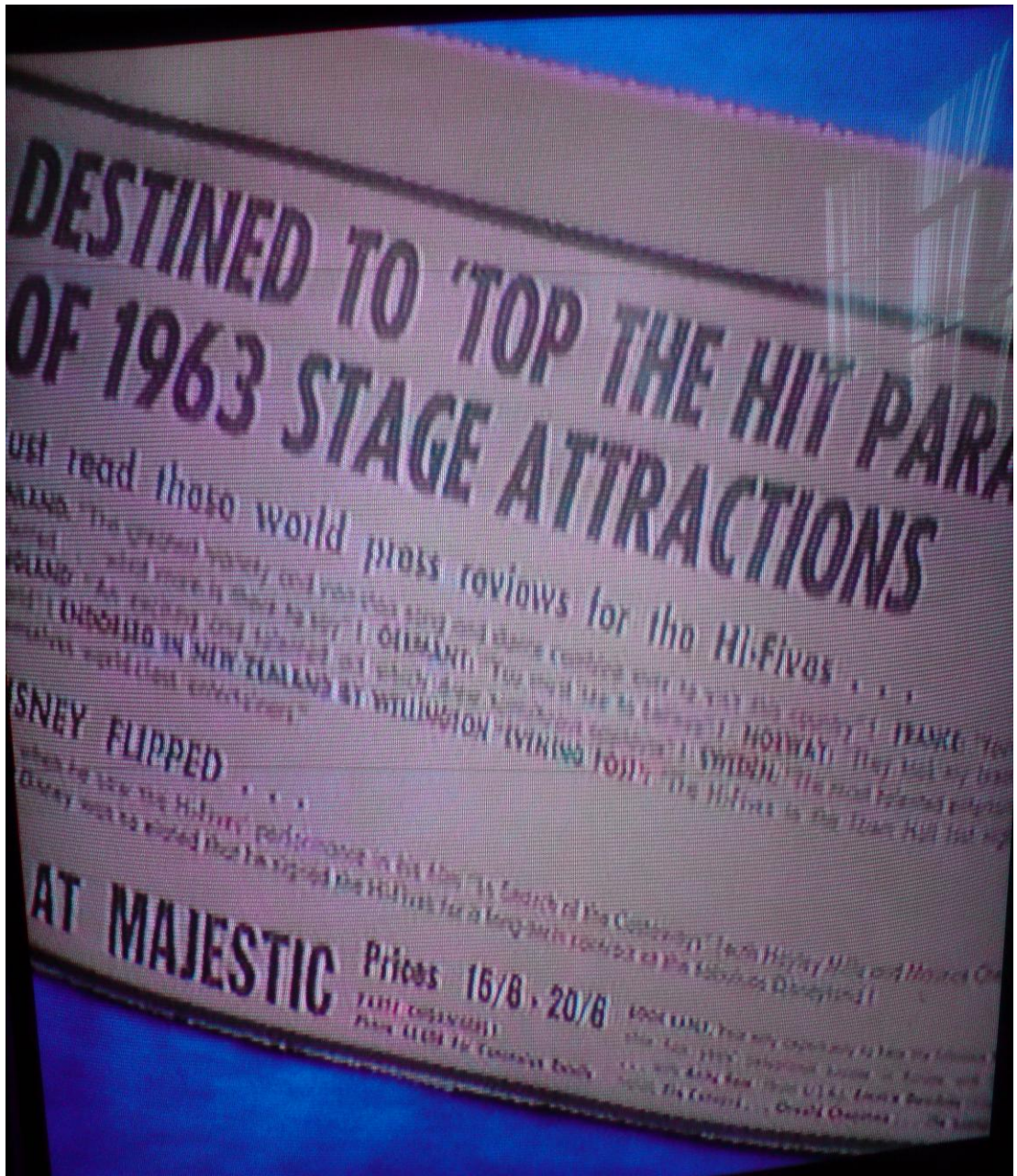
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Appendix A:







**Danny Robinson (Cancer)**  
Band leader (lead guitarist and rhythm),  
keyman. Toured Asia, Continent and  
the UK with the Maori Hi Five.  
TV recording overseas. Appeared with  
Rolling Stones in Singapore and The  
Beatles in the ABC Theatres,  
Blackpool, England. Also has  
appeared with such people as Tom  
Jones, Des O'Connor, TV programs.  
Five years' experience overseas before  
settling down on the Gold Coast.



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