

The impossible song of the huia: music in Taika Waititi's films

Music in film, diegetic and non-diegetic, creates and defines spaces and places in the mise en scene and in the relations it creates between the text and the audience, degrees of intimacy or distance, identification or alienation. This paper will examine the use of music in the films of New Zealand director Taika Waititi, focusing on *Boy* (2010), *What We Do in The Shadows* (2014) and *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* (2016). All of Waititi's films are set in New Zealand, and music provides a symbolic resource to think about various kinds of spatio-temporal relationships – global and local, Pakeha and Maori, colonisation and indigeneity, urban and rural, queer and straight. These relationships have grown and been articulated in different and arguably developing ways throughout Waititi's growing oeuvre, which is being increasingly recognised as one of international significance. For example, whereas in *Boy*, music is initially used to establish a nostalgic childhood, partially autobiographical, time and place, it is also used to create shared fantasy spaces where the conflicting desires of the central characters can be to some degree mediated and resolved. In the more recent *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, music is used rather to impose a kind of fantasy upon the audience, forcing them to re-evaluate the "classic Kiwi" blokes in the bush tropes of the source material (Barry Crump's *Wild Pork and Watercress*). Notable alongside Waititi's clever use of existing popular music, is his ongoing soundtrack collaboration with Wellington band the Phoenix Foundation, a group that Waititi describes as "gay". I want to consider the possibility that these films use music as part of an overall strategy of "campness" that locates a unique Kiwi queerness in the heart of the bush – like the impossible song of the huia, a supposedly extinct bird that the protagonists stumble across on their journey.