

Notes for the 'Music and Rhythm Panel'

Conference Title: 'Culture Moves: From Hiva to Hip Hop'¹

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Can I introduce my presentation today by explaining that much to the delight of my teenage daughter, I am not a dancer. Nothing horrifies my 15 year old Keriata more than the possibility of her father rising to make a spectacle of himself. I should say, then, that I am a musician both by orientation and by training. And even though I do have another substantial life in the world of research, I am delighted to discover how much music continues to influence the way I think about and experience knowledge. For I see knowledge as an energy, a flow, a process rather than simply a product. Knowledge arises in our experience of the world. We channel it in different ways, in different directions. At one point, my knowledge comes out as words from my mouth, as words upon a page. At another point, my knowledge comes out as music, as a song, as a rhythm. In our conference we are exploring ways in which particular kinds of knowledge, knowing and experience weave themselves in handsome ways in our artistic expressions.

As panellists we have been asked to comment on three questions concerning the relationship between music, rhythm and dance. Our first question reads:

What are the specific relationships between rhythm, vocals and body movement?

I would like to offer some thoughts on this question arising from my experience of haka (Māori dance) and mōteatea (chanted song poetry). We can note the difference that exists between dance which involves a music emanating from the body and the act of dancing *to* something, dancing to an accompaniment. Both are wonderful, of course. But they are different from one another. The act of singing and chanting at the same time as dancing is a tactile experience of quite a different order to one which involves dancing *to* something – an orchestra perhaps, a singer, a band and so on.

Haka of the Māori world, is an example of dancing which asks the dancer to chant at the same time as dancing. Here the rhythm of the dance itself is inextricably connected to the chanting and vice versa. Generally, the rhythm of the movements in haka are not to be at odds or to be a significant departure from the rhythm of the chanting. Each needs to be in correspondence and relationship to the other.

Chanting itself requires a substantial investment of internal energy, using muscles within the *poho* or the chest of the person as much as the legs and arms. There is an internal muscularity with chanting that one can underestimate. Just as a dancer needs to prepare the muscles, tendons and ligaments of the arms, legs, back and so on, so a chanter too

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needs to prepare the internal sinews of chest, diaphragm and stomach. Singing is a physical act, singing is dance in another form.

Another aspect of the tactile experience of chanting is the way in which the meanings of words express themselves in the physical experience of the dancer. This could be considered to be merely psychological; nonetheless I think there is a very real connection between the *meanings* of words and the spontaneous responses we may find in our skins, our muscles, our glands, our physiologies. Take the example of the dancer who does not know the meanings of the words he or she is chanting. There is no moral, emotional or spiritual force behind their experience. Conversely, take the example of the performer of the *ngeri*, who in attending the funeral for the descendant of a certain ancestor, then performs the dance composed by the ancestor, and, further still, is able to use the *ngeri* to comment on some aspect of the character of the person who has passed away.

In the example of the *maimai* (chants for the dead) for Wahineiti of Ngāti Raukawa, we hear not an impassioned exultation of the deceased relative but rather an angry sadness that he should have been killed so wastefully.

Wahineiti o runga i te rangi
Tuku iho ki raro rā
Ka hē ōu kōrero
Kihai koe i werohia ki te taoroa
I ākina ki te paraoa
Kia whakataukī ake te mamae, aue taukiri e!

Lofty Wahineiti
Come down from your height
Your words were wrong!
You were not challenged by the long spear
Or the whalebone club
Let me compose about my pain.

The death of our Ngāti Raukawa ancestor, Wahineiti, was a great calamity to our people. And it is the manner of his death that is commemorated in the song. Such a *maimai* comes to life when there is a force of actual experience, a depth of emotion behind it. This composition is often performed at the funerals conducted upon our marae. We also perform it upon the marae of other tribes during funerals for their esteemed leaders and chiefs. For example, we performed this *maimai* at the funeral for the late Sir Hepi Te Heuheu, paramount chief of Ngāti Tūwharetoa.

The most well-known *haka* is that composed by Te Rauparaha of Ngāti Toarangatira. It is a version of this *haka* that is seen widely upon rugby fields around the world as it is regularly performed by our beloved All Blacks. If we look closely at this *haka* we see that its mythological basis lies with the character of Hinenui-i-te-pō who stands at the threshold between night and day. The Ngāti Tūwharetoa woman, Te Rangikoea, standing at the mouth of the kūmara pit in which Te Rauparaha was hiding, is Hinenui-i-

te-pō and Hinētītama, the mythological feminine principle manifest which oversees the passage from day to night, from night to day.

Te Rauparaha's emergence from the kumara pit in which he was hiding is a re-enactment of the emergence of humankind itself from darkness into light. The words which say:

Ka mate, ka mate
Ka ora, ka ora
Is it death? Is it death?
Is it life, is it life?

are an echo of Te Rauparaha's coming to light from the darkness of the kumara pit. He is unsure whether he indeed will live or not, such was the desperation of his situation.

What is not so-well known, publicly at least, is the first stanza of his composition which goes as follows:

Kīkiki, Kākaka, kau ana
Kei waniwania taku tara
Kei tarawāhia kei te rua i te kerokero.
He pounga rāhui te uira
Ka rarapa, ketekete kau
Tō peru kei riri mau e koro e
Hī! Hā
Ka wehi au ka matakana
Ko wai te tangata kia rere ure tirohanga
Ngā rua rerarera
Ngā rua kurī kaka nui i raro ahaha! Hā

Here, the individual is caught in the kumara pit, unsure, frightened, apprehensive, yet explosively alert, senses heightened to an unbelievable degree. This composition too is regularly performed by our people of Ngāti Raukawa and Ngāti Toarangatira.

In considering our first question as to the relationship between music, rhythm and dance I have discussed the case of chanting whilst dancing, a distinctive feature of traditional *haka*. I feel that we have much more to learn here, and the kind of learning takes two forms:

1. *Scholarly Learning* – this is learning through extensive research into haka in history. This involves researching the knowledge held in our communities, documentary and archival research, analysing pre-existent ethnological materials and so on. This is important learning for it allows us to come to an understanding of haka in history using every available source of information at our disposal.
2. *'In-body Learning'* – this is the kind of tactile learning that takes place when one chants and dances at the same time. It involves exploring how the body

moves, acts, changes, copes, reacts, performs whilst it is singing and dancing. It involves the development of ‘body memory’ so that the experience becomes deeply internalised in the same way as learning to play an instrument internalises ‘moves’ within the body. (This is why teaching children young in a particular field is so important – it builds up body memory as much as ‘knowledge’ about an endeavour.)

Generally, I think there is much yet to discover here in the way in which chanted rhythm in haka relates to the outward movement of the body. Having made this point about ‘in-body’ learning, I would also like to note that as a composer of mōteatea, I am also interested to see what dancers may make of my singing and compositions. This might be a supplementary activity – inspiring a dancer to move to the sound world of mōteatea.

Our second question asks:

How have changes in technology impacted upon these relationships?

I do not have much to say on this question except to say that the digital revolution has been marvellous in being able to make the production of art and the creation of effect that much easier. Today it is very easy to edit video and audio and use these resources to quite astounding effect. And many of us do - performers of all kinds. However, we can note that in dance which is inspired or at least exists in relationship to chant, as in the case of haka, the use of the technology to present the chant (rather than a dancer/chanter) will have a tremendous influence. As I mentioned, there is a muscular experience associated with chanting which in turn impacts upon the dance performance which can only be achieved when one is chanting. One could dance to a CD of chanting if one wishes to, however, this would be a different experience to chanting at the same time as dancing.

The effect of playing a CD of chant and dancing to that is to release the performer from the internal world created through the production of chant in the body. Now it lies outside of the body and the task entails using one’s senses to envelope oneself in an external breathing, you might say. This is something that I am not well positioned to speak about. However, as someone who has spent a lot of time with mōteatea, I am intrigued by this idea of *manawa music*, music emanating from the body and how it interacts and inspires dance.

Our final question asks:

In many western and other dance genres, the movement may exist prior to the music or story. In your practice, what comes first, movement, music or the story?

In the composition of mōteatea, an event is most often the trigger or the inspiration which causes a composer to compose. What intrigues me are the traces – spiritual emotional, intellectual – that an event leaves upon a person, catalysing a deep resonance within, which then emanates outward into movement and finally into space. How does all this work? In my brief experience, I feel that I only have a partial understanding of this- not

only of the way this took place in the time of my ancestors but also what we might do with this today.

I think there is some kind of mysterious correspondence between the outside world of tactile experiences – loss, conflict, encounter, love, peace and so on – and our internal worlds of feeling, emotion, rationality and so on. This correspondence between internal and external worlds is a fundamental aspect of being human and it could be argued that all knowledge production – whether scientific, religious, artistic and so on – is about creating some kind of harmony, resonance and synergy between the two ‘worlds’. Undoubtedly the knowledge we create about the world is not just a dispassionate explanation about what has happened in our experience, but also some kind of ‘coming to terms’ with it. This is definitely the case when one composes a song, for example, as a lament for a deceased loved one. We use song – and other things such as dance, oratory, storytelling – to make sense of the loss and also to find our way out of grief. So, our compositions are not a mere explanation of what has happened but also an important tool for finding equilibrium again.

Hence, to answer our question, in my experience an event is the catalyst for composition. Sometimes I have composed songs which are not catalysed by an event and I have found them lacking in momentum and energy. I am not so ‘moved’ as I am when I fell in love or saw my first child or farewelled my uncle. It is these events that have ‘moved’ me to compose.

I would like to conclude my presentation by making some general comments about haka today.

In the world of Māori performing arts, a change is taking place. This change is being catalysed by research which represents an ever deeper dive into the knowledge and traditions of our ancestors and the reworking of those inspirations into forms and expressions that are meaningful today.

In recent decades, traditional Māori dance has been dominated by the legitimate and urgent need to project ourselves, our identity into the world. We have been appropriately concerned to articulate our disquiet about colonisation and our experience of the loss of culture and identity. Many dances of recent times, and the work of the modern kapa haka as a whole, have been important vehicles by which Māori have come to explore their identity and to express our view of the world. On the whole, however, what has emerged is a somewhat aggressive style of dance – masculine and assertive.

This can be contrasted with a wide range of dance styles that has been discovered within iwi histories and traditions. It has been popular to think about haka solely as war dance and displays of aggression – and, indeed, many types of haka were composed and performed for this purpose. The *peruperu*, the *taparahi*, the *tūtū ngārahu*, the *puha*, the *ngeri* and so on, are examples. However, there other kinds of dances as well such as the *puapua*, the *kori*, the *kopi*, the *oni*, and so on which were performed to entertain, to attract, to seduce and to beguile. What emerges, through research, is a variety of dance

styles expressing a diversity of emotion and experience. Fragments, ideas and perspectives on haka been found and it is hoped that this newly uncovered material will inspire dancers and choreographers to create new haka.

In my view, there are two particular aspects of dance which contemporary haka composers and dancers should explore. The first concerns a rebalancing of the masculine and the feminine in contemporary haka. These complementary aspects of our humanity are referred to in dances entitled *Te Haka-a-Tānerore*, ‘the dance of Tānerore’, and the *Te Haka-a-Hineruhi*, ‘the dance of Hineruhi’. I think we need a ‘rebalancing’ of the masculine and the feminine in new haka so that haka may be speak meaningfully to all aspects of our humanity and our experiences.

A second matter concerns the issue of identity with the natural world. Contemporary haka is preoccupied with asserting either ‘Māori’ identity or iwi identity. And this should continue and rightly so. However, this can be contrasted with haka in history and its interest in expressing aspects of the natural world into human creativity. A particularly distinctive aspect of traditional haka involved the transformation of the individual dancer into a bird, a fish, into light, into an animal and so on. This constituted a reflection and an expression of the energies and forms of the natural world into human performance. This is what I mean when I use the term ‘indigenous’ – the way in which natural world environments find expression and articulation in human creativity. ‘Indigenous theatre and performing arts’ is a set of terms we can use for this way of performing – the imaging and the imagining of the natural world in human artistic performance.

Kia ora.