

Maori Folk Music

• Folk and Traditional Styles

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Though not as well known in the United States, fans of rugby around the world are very familiar with Maori folk music. Whenever New Zealand's national rugby team plays, they perform a Maori dance called the *haka*. The *haka* is a shouted posture dance, usually performed by men, which was originally performed to entertain, welcome, and prepare for battle. The sight of 20 men shouting, making faces, and moving in perfect unison must rattle the competition-at least a little.

The Maori people are the original inhabitants of New Zealand, a country off the east coast of Australia consisting of two large and numerous smaller islands. European immigrants began to settle New Zealand beginning in the late 1700s, and today the Maori make up around 15 percent of the population. Related to Polynesians, the Maori settled the island beginning around A.D. 1200 and have developed a performing arts tradition (called *kapa haka* in Maori) that includes songs, chants, and dances-more often than not in combination. The Maori of today take great pride in the preservation of their culture, and in presenting events like the annual Aotearoa Traditional Maori Performing Arts Festival.

Maori Vocal Music

Maori vocal music can be grouped into two different types: sung and chanted music. Sung music, called *waiata-a-ringa*, is also called "action songs" because these songs are rarely performed without movement. *Waiata-a-ringa* developed around 1900 and demonstrate the influence of European music on the Maori. These songs, often accompanied by guitar, feature Maori lyrics and actions over a European-type melody and harmonic progression.

Large groups of singers often perform *waiata-a-ringa* with men and women performing different movements. The movements use mainly the arms and hands, which move and weave in deliberate patterns around the body. *Wiri*, a rapid, continuous side-to-side movement of the hand, figures prominently in *waiata-a-ringa* and other Maori movement.

Maori believe *wiri* represents the movements of the natural world, such as the shimmering of water or the rustling of leaves.

The other type of Maori vocal music, chant, can be traced to music from before European contact as it shows little evidence of foreign influence. There are several different kinds of chant. *Karakia* are incantations that range from charms spoken by children to longer ritual chants performed by Maori priests to bring sacredness to a new building. *Patere* and *kaioara* are two different chant forms that allow individuals to ridicule or belittle a person in public, which would otherwise be considered inappropriate.

Maori Instruments

Indigenous instruments were not abundant among the Maori, and are rarely played today other than for specific folk practices. European instruments, in particular the guitar, have become central to Maori musical performance. The *pahu*, a wooden idiophone of anywhere from 3 to 30 feet in length, was often hung by rope from a tree to play warning sounds or send communication between villages. The *putatara* is made from a conch shell and was also used as a signaling device. Other wind instruments include the *pukaea* (wooden trumpet), the *putorino* (a long vertical flute), and a small three-holed flute called an *nguru*.

Haka

The *haka* is the most visible dance/performance form among the Maori. There are many different types of haka, but most haka performed today are called *haka taparahi* ("haka without weapons"). Generally, a haka involves a large group of men dancing and chanting, often backed by female singers. The men move together in an upright but slightly squatted position with precise movements that include leg and arm slapping and jumping with legs folded under. In addition, performers will often make grimaces and stick out their tongues. Haka is more than recreation for the Maori-it carried important social significance since the reputation of the tribe could change based on their ability to perform the haka.

Poi and Titi Torea

Poi is both the name of a dance and the name of an instrument comprised of one or more lightweight, decorated balls tied to the end of a string. In performance, men and women sing while women skillfully twirl the poi balls around in unison in beautifully intricate patterns. The poi balls also make noise when the ends are hit together, adding a percussive effect to the music. *Titi torea* is another movement activity that requires serious dexterity and training. Often children participate in titi torea for this reason. It involves tossing two sticks back and forth with a partner to the beat while singing a song. With practice, tossing becomes more complicated with crossing and flipping.