

Music transmission in an Auckland Tongan community youth band

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Abstract

This article reports on findings from a 2006 ethnographic study of a Tongan community youth band in Auckland, New Zealand. To begin, the study's rationale is discussed in relation to previous research, followed by a description of the band's repertoire and rehearsal strategies, instrumentation and uniforms, notational practices and institutional context. The youth band's role in the Tongan community of Auckland is then considered in relation to previous descriptions of 'community music'. The band's significance in terms of musical identity and its socio-economic context are also examined, followed by a discussion of this study's implications for community music workers in other settings. The findings suggest that community ensembles rooted in musical hybridity may generate innovative models of music learning and play a unique role in cultural preservation.

Keywords

community band
Tonga
New Zealand
youth
hybridity
Polynesia

Introduction

Tingling, a numbing sensation lingered, spreading slowly from the tip of my tongue, across the palate and into my throat.¹ An almost peppery or gingery taste, and a bamboo-like odour, as we drank the *kava*² from halved coconut shells. 'Brother Dave, more kava...drink' and the large, half-naked Tongan man beside me kindly refilled my *ipu* shell from the communal bowl. I was sitting on a large woven mat alongside eight Tongan men around the *kumete*, a wooden bowl used for the *faikava* drinking ritual. 'Ah, good on you' they approved, as I sipped a bit more kava. Most of the men wore *lavalava* robes and all were barefoot or in sandals. We were inside a simple, windowless wooden building that only contained a few benches constructed from large slabs of wood. After drinking a few cups of the pungent kava, their talking grew slower, and finally the men began to sing. They had rich and deep, impossibly relaxed voices, and sang in improvised harmony their slow and hauntingly beautiful *hiva kakala* songs with guitar accompaniment.

I asked the elderly man beside me what tonight's songs were about, and his eyes brightened as he described a boy who would swim each evening to a distant island to meet the most beautiful girl, to whom he would give coconuts, fresh flowers and fish he had caught along the way. Soon the women from this Tongan community entered the kava circle to serve us enormous helpings of roasted pork, green-lipped mussels, *kumara* and *taro*.³ This was just another weekend gathering in the largest Tongan community outside of Tonga.⁴ Only a few miles away, the tallest tower in the southern hemisphere graced the Auckland city skyline, where the

1. Much of this research was presented at the 2006 conferences of IGEB and the Society for Ethnomusicology. For their insightful comments and suggestions, the author thanks Jane Moulin, Adrienne Kaeppler and Richard Moyle.
2. Kava is a ritualistic drink made from the kava plant (*Piper methysticum*) that is popular in many South Pacific cultures.
3. This cuisine is quite similar to Maori *kai*, as described in *The Ethnomusicologist's Cookbook* (Hebert 2006).
4. This data is from field notes from 16 April 2006. Accurate information regarding current conditions in

Tonga may be freely obtained online from the CIA's publication *World Factbook* (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>).

5. Pseudonyms have been used in this article for the names of the band and its director.
6. Diaspora refers to a group of people who are dispersed from their original homeland. The maintenance of cultural identity within diasporic communities has become a topic of great interest among social scientists in recent decades (Bohlman 2007).

downtown streets more closely resemble Hong Kong than a Polynesian village. Hours before the kava ritual, I had arrived at this Tongan church for more data collection as part of my ongoing research and was astonished by the spectacle there. The region's leading Tongan brass band was intensely rehearsing a unique arrangement of Handel's 'Coronation Anthem' with a large choir singing full-voice in the Tongan language, in earnest preparation for the Tongan king's arrival in Auckland. Little did they know, this would be their final chance to perform a ceremony for King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV (1918–2006).

A few months later, on 10 September 2006 the Tongan king passed away, ending his 40-year reign as one of the longest serving sovereigns in the world. Since Tongan brass bands had been enthusiastically patronized by the king, his death marked a possible turning point for these bands – both in Tonga and abroad – and it remains to be seen how these popular community ensembles will adapt to new conditions.

Rationale and related research

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in 2006, this study examines a Tongan community youth band in Auckland, New Zealand, with particular attention to its role in the transmission of cultural heritage. I will describe various aspects of Auckland Tongan Youth Brass,⁵ including its position in terms of the five components of community music outlined by Veblen (2008), then examine issues raised by this case that challenge current conceptions of diasporic⁶ identity in music (including models of musical hybridity and transculturation), and finally discuss conclusions and implications this case may have for community music practitioners working in vastly different contexts.

Why study a Tongan community band in Auckland?

Some readers may initially question the global relevance of this study. Its rationale is based on five points, each of which will be explained in detail: (1) Auckland, New Zealand is home to the largest urban enclave of Tongan migrants; (2) brass bands occupy a position of great political and religious importance in Tongan society; (3) bands among the Tongan community of New Zealand have remained unstudied; (4) little has been published regarding the practices of these bands even within their homeland of Tonga; and (5) community bands are an area of great interest within the rapidly developing field of community music, and much has remained unknown regarding how such bands naturally operate among the minority populations that many community music 'workers' strive to better serve (Veblen and Olsson 2002).

David Hargreaves and Adrian North (2001: xii) observed that, 'If we broaden the scope of "music education" to take into account those activities and experiences which take place outside the classroom, then it becomes even more important to consider the influence of different cultural traditions and environments on musical development, as well as those of peers, parents, local organizations and other external influences'. The position that Hargreaves and North articulate here has resonated with many music education scholars, some of whom have entered the field of community music with an interest in learning both how to better support existing traditions and better adapt effective aspects of informal practices within school settings.

Relevant research

Community music research is arguably still in its infancy in Australasia, but it is useful here to briefly discuss relevant publications that provide a scholarly foundation for this inquiry. Previous community music studies have examined choral ensembles in New Zealand (Tipping 2005), and community bands in Australia (Coffman 2006), but further research is especially needed into musical activities among various ethnic-minority and diaspora populations. Auckland is one of the major cities of this region, regarded as 'the Polynesian capital' because its Pacific Islander population is the largest of any metropolitan area in the world, comprising thriving communities of Samoans, Tongans, Fijians, Niueans, Tahitians, Tuvaluans, Tokelauans and various others. Among some cultural groups, such as the Niueans, the adult population in Auckland is actually larger than back home. Auckland is currently home to nearly one-fourth of the world's population of Tongans.⁷

Despite the importance of Auckland's unique urban enclave of Pacific Islanders, and the significance of its musical practices for maintaining cultural heritage, ensembles within this community have received little attention from scholars. Rob Flaes (2000) in the only global survey of brass band traditions, observed that 'there is little written information about these bands' in Oceania (148). There appears to have been only one published study from fieldwork among Polynesian brass bands in New Zealand (Hebert, in press), but that was among Maori, who are regarded as quite distinct from Pacific Islanders within the New Zealand context. Thus, this study of a Tongan band in Auckland attempts to break some new ground in terms of community music research but, at the same time, also makes a modest attempt to attain some more general insights regarding contemporary Tongan music.

Although the traditional music of Tonga has been studied by ethnomusicologists, Tongan brass bands have received minimal attention, a fact that is surprising considering their prominent role in religious and political rituals. Renowned ethnomusicologist Richard Moyle has thoroughly studied Tongan traditional music, and written prolifically about it, but European-derived genres such as brass bands have mostly fallen outside the scope of his primary research interests (Moyle 1987). Mervyn McLean's book *Weavers of Song: Polynesian Music and Dance* provides a few pages on Tongan brass bands, noting their importance within the monarchy (McLean 1999). Tongan bands are also briefly mentioned in the 'Australia and the Pacific Islands' volume of the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (Kaeppler and Love 1998). Updated information regarding most ongoing research studies in Tonga may be obtained from the Tonga Research Association, currently based in Australia.⁸

Probably the most useful information regarding Tongan brass bands may be gleaned from two publications, neither of which is easily acquired in the Northern hemisphere. The first of these is a book published in Tonga by Ad Linkels that covers a broad spectrum of themes, including Tongan traditional arts, culture and politics (Linkels 1992). The second useful resource is the first six pages of text in a book chapter by anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler (1998), who rivals Moyle as a leading scholarly expert on Tongan traditional music. Graduate student researchers are also making particularly important contributions in this area. A doctoral student affiliated with the University of Hawaii is currently writing a dissertation

7. Detailed demographic information regarding the Pacific Islander population is freely available online from Statistics New Zealand at <http://www.stats.govt.nz/default.htm>.
8. The Tonga Research Association (formerly, Tongan History Association) is an interdisciplinary organization of scholars: <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/anthropology/tonga/index>.

on brass bands in Tonga, according to University of Hawaii Professor Jane Moulin, and an unpublished Master's thesis has also examined aspects of the brass band tradition in Tonga (Aldred 1997).

What makes the present study unique is that it is based on fieldwork with a specific Tongan youth band in New Zealand, and its findings are considered within the conceptual framework of 'community music' studies. Comparison of previous (and future) publications with findings from the present study may also enable some tentative conclusions to be drawn regarding differences between brass bands among the diaspora community in New Zealand versus those back home in Tonga. The findings may also provide useful insights for those involved in community music in other settings who may be grappling with how best to support young fusion genres and migrant traditions.

The Auckland Tongan Youth Brass

Overview

The Auckland Tongan Youth Brass (ATYB) emerged in the late 1990s, and was officially established as a community organization in 2000. It has around 20 members, all of whom are of Tongan ethnicity, living mostly in the Panmure area of East Auckland, although a few live across town in Otarā and Mangere. According to the bandleader, it is one of seven Tongan bands in the greater Auckland area, the only one not directly affiliated with a specific Tongan church. The bandleader describes ATYB as 'the first Tongan youth brass band raised in New Zealand. The other ones were for adults. With this group, some began in primary school, some in intermediate, ten years old and up. One kid started at eight years old.' Its performances, he explains, consist of 'funerals, birthdays, Christmas carols, Christmas parades, community events, different occasions like shopping malls, factory parties and to open a new business.'

The text box below consists of a direct quotation from the band's promotional materials that indicates how the ensemble describes itself to outsiders:

Auckland Tongan Youth Brass is a non-profit group of young boys and girls, young women and men between the ages of 8 to 20 years old. The group was originally founded as the East Auckland Brass on 12 January 2000.

Auckland Tongan Youth Brass has the following aims:

- To promote cultural maintenance
- To foster positive youth programs aimed at combating and avoiding young people from getting into gang-related activities
- Initiate some positive attitudes into these youths by running brass evening practices, *po ako* or home work evenings for its members
- To nurture a closer relationship between these children and their families, the church, their schools and their communities
- Encourage participation in community activities
- And to encourage involvement in other charitable activities

The goals of the group are:

- To participate in charitable activities around the Auckland area
- To participate in community activities such as Santa Parades
- To participate in school activities

Many interesting details may be gleaned from the above description that may appear rather unusual from an international perspective: (1) Tongan cultural maintenance is an explicit objective of this brass band; (2) the band is presented as an alternative to participation in youth gangs; (3) tutoring of homework – explained in Tongan terminology – is mentioned as one of band’s aims; and (4) both church and school activities are mentioned.

Consistent with the ‘Ensemble Ethos Model’ for conceptualization of music ensemble subcultures (Hebert 2005; Hebert, forthcoming), this study explored the nature of relationships between the ATYB band-leader and the aspiring musicians in the ensemble, as well as between musician tutors and tutees, and finally, the role of the ensemble within its institutional and community contexts. Based upon this backdrop of investigating such broader features, the following sections will focus the narrative on a description of the band’s repertoire and rehearsal strategies, instrumentation and uniforms, notational practices and institutional context.

Repertoire and rehearsal strategies

The Auckland Tongan Youth Brass (ATYB) rehearses each Saturday in a community hall in East Auckland within a large rugby field that is maintained by the city department of parks and recreation. On warm days, the sound of their music can be heard through the hall’s open doors and windows, and far across the field, inspiring some park visitors and rugby fans to stop by and briefly observe their rehearsals. Upon first attending one of the band’s rehearsals on 25 February 2006, I was struck by the sheer breadth and diversity of their repertoire, ranging from complex arrangements of traditional Tongan songs, marches, hymns and classical anthems to international hit songs such as ‘Time to Say Goodbye’ (popularized by Sarah Brightman and Andrea Bocelli) and even an amusing version of ‘Touch Me Baby One More Time’ (popularized by American pop idol Britney Spears). Nine band members were present at this rehearsal, ranging from approximately 15 to 25 years of age, a bit older than I had expected. This included two euphonium players (one of whom led the ensemble), one tubist, three cornetists and three tenor horn players. The ensemble leader, its assistant director, was a young man with excellent tone and technique on the euphonium, and who I later learned did much of the arranging for the ensemble and studied music at the local university. All three cornet players were women, as was the other euphonium player. Most had a high level of performance skills, although the youngest boys on tenor horns occasionally struggled with their parts.

Rehearsal strategies of ATYB were rather unlike most wind bands and brass bands I have observed in other settings, more closely resembling approaches commonly encountered in the Afro-American hybrid tradition of jazz. The band rehearses for a few hours in the late morning on Saturdays, followed by a break for lunch and then a further rehearsal in the afternoon. The bandleader, a middle-aged man, essentially serves in a managerial role but conducts during actual performances, while a young man in his twenties (whom I will refer to as its ‘assistant director’) leads much of the rehearsals. The assistant director conducts without a

baton, indicating the beat by snapping his fingers and stamping his foot on the floor while playing along with the ensemble on his euphonium. He often models his interpretation of various parts by singing them for the other players and especially emphasizes accents, style and correct notes and rhythms. All of his instruction is in the Tongan language, although some of the questions from players consist of brief bits of English mixed with Tongan. Sheet music manuscripts consisting of European music notation are used for some international pieces, but traditional Tongan notation (which I shall describe later) is used for the Tongan pieces.

This description of rehearsal strategies may strike some readers as unusual, inspiring curiosity regarding where this kind of band comes from and what historical influences serve as the basis for its tradition. Brass bands have been associated with Tongan schools since 1885, when they were first established at both the Tonga Government College and Tupou College (McLean 1999: 446). The Tongan band style developed across the next century of contact with Europeans, but especially thrived under the 40-year reign of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV (1966–2006), who indicated a strong preference for brass bands in his formal ceremonies. This tradition was brought to New Zealand in recent years along with Tongan migrants, where it coexists alongside New Zealand's own firmly established brass band tradition (Bythell 2000; Newsome 1988). Ironically, it is possible that some of the original influences for Tongan brass bands may be traceable to New Zealand. As Adrienne Kaepler observed, 'During the mid-19th century, military and civilian brass bands were highly popular in Britain and if not imported into Tonga directly, may have come by way of New Zealand where brass band competitions have been held since the 1880s (but were more associated with expatriates than with Maoris)' (Kaepler 1998: 40). As discussed elsewhere, the native Maori of New Zealand developed a separate brass band tradition that has also been maintained through the present (Hebert, in press), but there is little evidence of interaction between Maori and Tongan brass bands. The extent to which Tongan bands may have interacted with Samoan, Hawaiian (Hennessey 2001), and other Polynesian bands is a topic that calls for further research that is outside the scope of this study.

While Tongan bands play some European music – such as Salvation Army hymn tunes or military marches – they also have unique arrangements based on local songs. Tongan bands perform marches and genres called *anitemi* and *himi* – for the English terms 'anthem' and 'hymn' – and arrangements of traditional Tongan songs such as the kava ritual music described at the start of this article. As the ATYB bandleader put it, 'We still like our Tongan style, and we don't want to lose out on our style of music.' He often hears Tongan brass band pieces that he likes on the radio and then places an order to have them sent in the mail from Tonga. Arrangers will typically send arrangements for free, but sometimes they require *mea ofa* (a donation). Some of the great composers and arrangers in the Tongan brass band tradition include Koloa Pakileata (a former bandmaster of Tupou College), Moses Toafa and Malekamu Manu Jr.

Unlike brass fusion genres in most other parts of the world, improvisation plays a rather minimal role in these ensembles. According to the Auckland Tongan bandleader,

When they play in the band and have the experience of playing for say, three years, then they start to make up their own notes. At the church, they can't. But when they play in the concert they can. The conductor says the key and the name of the tune, then everybody has to find their own note.

Within ATYB, the assistant bandleader and one of the most advanced cornetists tend to improvise sections of some pieces, while other players tend to stick almost entirely to playing the written parts.

Instrumentation and uniforms

Instrumentation is one important component of instrumental ensemble traditions that provides important insights into broader issues, including the approach to leadership within the ensemble context. As mentioned earlier, the assistant director of ATYB plays the euphonium. In these kinds of ensembles, the euphonium typically plays important melody lines, consistent with the tradition of Tongan church hymns. Many traditional Tongan songs make use of four parts or voices: *fasi* (falsetto/soprano), *kanokano* (alto), *tenoa* (tenor) and *laulalo* (bass). The most important among these are the *fasi* and *laulalo*, the latter of which is often considered to be at the 'heart' of the ensemble. In a Tongan brass context, the euphonium will sometimes play the *laulalo* part (typically doubled an octave lower in a somewhat simplified version on tuba), but will sometimes switch to the *fasi* part. Tenor horns usually cover the middle-range parts, such as *tenoa*.

Kaepler proposed a thought-provoking interpretation regarding this choice of instrumentation in Tongan brass bands:

Influenced, I believe, by the mellow sound of a nose flute, their brass bands did not include mouth flutes, piccolos, or French horns, which were included in other Pacific brass bands. Instead, Tongans emphasized tubas, euphoniums, and baritones that echoed the importance of the *laulalo* or bass part in Tongan choral music.

(Kaepler 1998: 42)

While Kaepler's comment regarding the nose flute seems speculative, her point about the overall aesthetic sensibility of this music, and the role of the nose flute within Tongan music generally, is well taken.

Many Tongan brass band pieces also feature a brief section in the middle where the players loudly sing their parts while only a few musicians (often the tuba player) continue playing their instruments. Compared with other global brass band traditions, the prominent role of singing in these ensembles seems unusual. I asked the ATYB bandleader why they play brass instruments that are originally from Europe instead of their own Tongan instruments. He explained this as follows:

Tongan people are a people who love music, it doesn't matter what music, but they love music, that's their style, that's their life. The brass instruments

come from overseas, but remember before in Tonga they had their flute and drum. When glass bottles (for wine) first came to the island they used them for an instrument. They called it a *kofe* and they put a hole on both ends and used it to play music. It sounds funny, but that's how they make their instruments. Bamboo too: between the joints it is closed, and they make a hole in the side and use their nose to play, the sound comes out, like a flute. They used that flute and they used, you know, oil drums, they cut those in half and opened the other end, and got some cow skins, dried it up and tied on both ends and used it for their drum. They sang with it and that was very, very nice. That's the old days.

(Interview with ATYB Bandleader, 15 April 2006)



Figure 1: Four ATYB members. (photograph courtesy of David Solo)



Figure 2: All ATYB members in group photograph. (photograph courtesy of David Solo)

Clothing, hairstyle and accessories are also fundamentally important markers of cultural identity, particularly among the youth of any nation. In its rehearsals, the Tongan band members dressed in very casual clothing. All members, including girls, wore T-shirts and pants of varying lengths. Their T-shirts often featured island designs with waves, surfers, floral prints and even the phrase “Tongan Power”. Almost all band members wore sandals or went barefoot, although a few wore light athletic shoes. Typically about one-third of the band members wore sunglasses and about the same ratio wore baseball-style caps throughout the rehearsal. The girls had long hair and wore almost no jewellery or makeup. The hairstyle of boys ranged widely from military-style crew cuts to shoulder-length, and all were fairly clean-shaven with no noticeable body piercings or tattoos.

While rehearsal settings are rather casual, performances are occasions for formal clothing. The band makes use of at least four different kinds of uniform for different performance occasions, entailing a unique fusion of European marching band uniforms with traditional Polynesian attire: floral shirts for ‘island concerts’, black shirts with traditional woven skirts for women during funerals, and then two kinds of formal wear with tuxedos: red bow-ties for one and red neck-ties for the other, complete with a military-style jacket and *lavalava* kilts (see Figures 1 and 2).

Notational practices

The use of notation provides a particularly interesting example of how musicians mentor each other and adapt to the requirements of a tradition. One of the more interesting features of transmission in Polynesian

brass bands is the use of unique forms of notation for learning song repertoire. The notation system is essentially a form of movable-do solfege, encoded in Tongan numbers: ‘Do, fa, ni, oh, tu, va, hi, do.’ However, these are not the numbers that readers would probably expect. They are in English, ‘three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and three.’ Why no one or two? As the ATYB assistant director explained to me, in the Tongan language the numbers ‘one’ and ‘two’ are problematic since they produce phrases that resemble profanity when spoken in combination with other numbers. The ATYB bandleader explained to me that this system was invented and popularized in the 1860s by Dr James Moulton, principal of Tupou College, which corroborates previous findings by Moyle (1987: 25).

The chart below explains the use of pitches in the Tongan notation system:

| Western scale degree | Equivalent in key of ‘C’ | Pitch name in Tongan | Translation of Tongan term |
|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1st (tonic) | C | ‘Do’ | Three |
| 2nd | D | ‘Fa’ | Four |
| 3rd | E | ‘Ni’ | (abbr. ‘nima’): Five |
| 4th | F | ‘Oh’ | (abbr. ‘ono’): Six |
| 5th | G | ‘Tu’ | (abbr. ‘fiti’): Seven |
| 6th | A | ‘Va’ | (abbr. ‘valu’): Eight |
| 7th | B | ‘Hi’ | (abbr. ‘hiva’): Nine |
| 8th (octave) | C | ‘Do’ | Three |

In the Tongan system of music notation, the names used for pitches are particular Tongan numbers or abbreviated versions of numbers in the Tongan language. It is essentially the equivalent of a solfege system. A line struck through a number indicates that it is to be played as a sharp. In other words, in the key of C, a 4 with a line through it equates to an F#, while in the key of G, a 2 with a line through it becomes the equivalent of an A# or Bb.

It seems useful here to demonstrate this system in the context of a familiar song. Below is how the first four measures of the famous melody ‘Ode to Joy’ would look in traditional Tongan notation. The first phrase of the song begins on the third degree of whatever key is chosen (C is used for illustration here, clearly indicated in the upper left). The third degree is represented with a 5 in Tongan music, since the tonic is the number 3:

C
 || 5 5 / 6 7 | 7 6 / 5 4 | 3 3 / 4 5 | 5: -4 / 4: - |

The following are some of the most basic rules for rhythm and metre within this notational system:

- Vertical lines represent divisions between measures: |
- Double vertical lines represent the beginnings/endings of melodies: ||

- The mid-point of each measure is represented with a slash: /
- Colons and dashes mean that a note is held longer: :-
- The key of all Tongan notation is moveable, which means that if a C is written on the top left at the start of this notation, the melody for Ode to Joy will begin on an E, while if an F is written the melody will begin with an A, etc.

According to ATYB band members, this notational system is learned in the Tongan churches, both in New Zealand and Tonga, and is also taught in Tongan schools. The assistant director, who studies composition at the local university, has found the Tongan system to be more intuitive and efficient than European notation, and much easier to teach to students.

Institutional context

Liora Bresler writes of how improvisation often becomes a necessary component of qualitative research in music (Bresler, in press). While this research began with the understanding that ATYB is not a church-affiliated ensemble, the band's schedule unexpectedly led me to visit various Tongan churches where I was able to observe the context of performances. Many performances take place in churches because these sites serve as Tongan cultural centres, the importance of which takes on far greater prominence in the diasporic context of New Zealand. The following field notes are from a performance of AYT on 12 August 2006:

Today's performance is at the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, in Favona, South Auckland. The church is a large, white wooden structure surrounded by a parking lot filled with cars. Inside are dozens of simple wooden pews and a congregation of about 700 people, all of whom appear to be of Tongan ethnicity. All men in the church are wearing neckties, and many also wear lavalavas (Polynesian kilts) and sandals. Most of the women have long hair that is tied back, dresses with floral patterns and many accessories, including multiple necklaces and bracelets mostly made of seashells. Many mothers have taken young children and babies who often cry throughout the service. A teenage girl beside me appears to be bored, and sends 'text' messages throughout most of the service on her mobile phone. A new pastor has just arrived from Tonga today to give his first sermon. The entire service is in Tongan language, as are the pamphlets and hymnals provided. The elderly pastor makes enormous gestures with his hands as he speaks passionately to his audience. His podium is surrounded by six bouquets of flowers; and Tongan flags and church symbols are posted on each end of the stage. No piano or organ can be found in the church, but its pews are filled with at least six different choirs, each with its own colourful uniform. Conductors – all of whom are men – direct their choirs with long batons, briefly pausing between pieces to provide a pitch with a pitch pipe. The choirs sing in harmony at full volume, reading their parts from traditional Tongan notation. The brass band has come to accompany one of these choirs whose membership includes friends and family of the band members.

Consideration of this kind of religious context is critical when examining the role of music in any community (see Figures 3 and 4). As Cox has



Figure 3: Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Favona, New Zealand. (photograph by David Hebert)

observed, we must 'discern the links for musical learners and musical participants between religious and musical experience, both involving a combination of intellectual and emotional engagement, hard to translate into words' (Cox 2007: 72). While the ATYB bandleader describes his band as 'not officially affiliated with a church', many of its performances are in churches, accompanying choirs on Tongan hymns, evidently serving a religious function. This raises the question of whether this ensemble should even be considered 'community music' rather than church music, an issue that requires thorough consideration.

Discussion

The Auckland Tongan band as community music

Community music (CM) is a rapidly developing field of study that appears to still be grappling to fully define itself and delineate its scope. In a recent examination of the field, Koopman (2007) notes this issue, but identifies agreement among scholars regarding three main characteristics of community music: 'collaborative music-making, community development and personal growth' (Koopman 2007: 153).

In the inaugural issue of *International Journal of Community Music*, Kari Veblen (2008) discusses various definitions of the field and



Figure 4: Choir singing with brass band accompaniment at Favona Tongan Church. (photograph by David Hebert)

identifies five themes that are often associated with CM ensembles and programmes:

1. The kinds of music and music-making involved
2. The intentions of the leaders or participants
3. The characteristics of the participants
4. The interactions among teaching/learning aims, knowledge and strategies
5. Interplays between informal and formal social/educational/cultural contexts

How does the case of the Auckland Tongan Youth Brass (ATYB) look in terms of Veblen's description?

1. Kinds of music and music-making involved

The performance schedule of ATYB provides live brass band music for Tongan weddings, funerals, parades and various cultural events in the Auckland area. This clearly fits other CM cases, in which the music is socially contextualized as 'part of cultural and arts events, linked with celebrations, ceremonies, rituals, play, education, social uplift or life passages' (Veblen 2008).

2. Intentions of the leaders or participants

According to Veblen (2008), one objective often seen in CM programmes is to 'nurture both individual and collective identity'. Strengthening of Tongan identification is one outcome of the use of the Tongan language in all ATYB rehearsals, along with the use of traditional songs from the homeland, uniforms based on Tongan patterns and performances in Tongan ritual contexts. Reinforcement of cultural identity is clearly among the ensemble's primary objectives.

3. Characteristics of the participants

Veblen (2008) notes that some CM programmes 'exist to bring music to "disadvantaged" or "marginalized" people; others aim to comfort immigrants as they enter a new, "host" culture'. Indeed, ATYB certainly appears to embody these characteristics as well, serving an economically disadvantaged cultural group that has emigrated to a more financially prosperous nation. Within its promotional materials, the band explicitly describes itself as serving 'at risk' youth, and all of its members are from the local Pacific Islander community.

4. Interactions among teaching/learning aims, knowledge and strategies

Among many CM programmes, Veblen (2008) identifies a 'fluidity of knowledge, expertise and roles, with individuals participating in various ways from observer, to participant, to creator, to leader'. This characteristic is also evident in ATYB, within the interactions between the ensemble's director, assistant director and other student leaders. Although the ensemble director is ultimately responsible for the band's schedule of activities, the assistant director plays an important role in arranging band music and conducting rehearsals, and the more advanced players on each instrument actively mentor their younger peers.

5. Interplays between informal and formal social/educational/cultural contexts

Veblen (2008) suggests that scholars in CM studies consider how various 'musical cultures embody (mirror, reflect and shape) social cultures and vice-versa'. This final component of Veblen's description seems less explicitly defined, but seems to encompass notions of identity, social structure and agency, or how participants in musical activities develop self-understanding while also contributing broadly to the reification and deconstruction of both standardized behavioural expectations and interpretations of experience. In other words, the process by which culture is constructed via musical participation calls for greater attention in CM studies, a point also advocated by various scholars who have suggested that the traditional emphases of musicology require rethinking (Clarke and Cook 2004; Clayton, Herbert and Middleton 2003). According to my reading, our task then is to examine the role of CM ensembles within a broader social context, an objective that will serve as the overarching theme for the remainder of this article.

Diasporic musical identity

Sociologist Peter J. Martin has observed that people 'actively use music in the process of establishing and maintaining a distinct sense of self, an identity that, though constantly evolving, provides both psychological

security and a sense of belonging to a wider community' (Martin 2005: 70). Martin's point is well taken, and in the case of CM ensembles one must consider not only the evolution of individual identities, but also that of the 'wider community' as a definable entity, and even of the musical sound when situated in contexts that engender musical hybridity and transculturation. Defining a community on the basis of its musical practices can be a complicated matter when it comes to minority populations within modern industrialized nations. Indeed, ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino has noted that 'diasporic formations are not objective entities but are constructed identity units, based on signs and discourses of similarity and unity' (Turino 2004: 5). Among minority youth the implications of this construction are quite apparent, but even more so in cases of music students who are descendants of refugees, for example, or whose parents are from two different cultures. In diasporic contexts, the minority group's efforts to maintain its heritage are often amplified out of concern for the fragility of cultural identity against homogenizing forces sustained from the majority population.

The concept of 'intercultural music transmission' has been introduced elsewhere (Hebert 2001) and is another factor that must be taken into account in such cases, as individual agency on the part of charismatic musical leaders typically contributes to identity within any musical diaspora. In the Tongan case, some individual bandleaders have reportedly returned to Tonga following musical studies at conservatories in Europe or North America with altered opinions of how Tongan bands should sound. Some then encourage their bands to play with a more smooth and refined sound, 'according to Western standards of how brassband music should sound'; however, 'Not everybody is happy with this as it is not considered to be Tongan style' (Linkels 1992: 98). Such approaches may conflict with the traditional Tongan brass band style, which is relatively rugged and consistently loud, even 'with each member playing as if his life depended on it' (Linkels 1992: 98).

But this begs the question of whether there can be a truly 'Tongan' music if it is continuously evolving and fusing with European influences both 'back home' and within the diasporic context of New Zealand. What implications does this situation have for the notion of musical authenticity, and for music instruction in particular, or does that issue no longer matter for musicians, scholars and educators?

Stephen Davies has noted that 'more interest was shown by the close of the twentieth century by ethnomusicologists in hybrid and acculturated musical types. Nevertheless, their tendency to abandon all talk of authenticity is deeply misguided' (Davies 2001: 293). Indeed, in the case of any fully developed tradition, the judgments of local cultural authorities will tend to be based on precise characteristics that are emblematic of how authenticity is perceived, even if initially incomprehensible to the outsider. To the insider, Tongan brass bands are certainly Tongan music. The late king was 'a great fan of brassbands and stimulate[d] the use of them, especially in churches' (Linkels 1992: 98). This is partly due to the fact that the king was himself an ordained minister who recognized the fundamentally important role of music within churches. As the ATYB bandleader explained, 'We still keep our Tongan style of music separate from the European style

9. Economic comparisons gleaned from the CIA's online publication *World Factbook* (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>).

of music.' Richard Moyle has acknowledged that 'the strength of the Tongan musical heritage is such that foreign styles have not obliterated existing characteristics; rather, individual European elements have been incorporated to produce a distinctive "Tongan" sound which retains links with the past while serving present ends' (Moyle 1987: 239). Perhaps, in time, Tongan brass bands may even come to be regarded as the most Tongan of Tongan musics, just as *gagaku* court music (originally imported to Japan from China and Korea) is often considered to represent the heart of Japanese musical tradition (Wade 2005). While Tongan bands clearly represent a fusion tradition that on the surface may appear more European than Polynesian in origin, they have developed deep metaphorical roots within Tongan social life in which their sounds resonate with profound meanings.

Socio-economic context

According to the ATYB bandleader, various philanthropic organizations and community trusts provide support for the ensemble's expenses, including musical instruments, uniforms and transportation. In fact, a co-authored grant application was the means by which I was able to obtain access to the band for the purpose of this study. Various organizations provide support to ATYB in recognition that it effectively serves a population that is typically under-funded. Here it is important to consider the role of socio-economic status for this ensemble.

Unlike many diasporic communities, Tongans voluntarily migrate to Auckland for work opportunities, since it is the closest major city. Compared with other developed nations, New Zealand is relatively hospitable toward migrants in terms of public health care, social services and education, and many Pacific Islanders find the opportunities afforded them as residents of Auckland are far greater than back home. Still, some face various difficulties, including prejudice. In *Anthropological Quarterly*, Niko Besnier describes the speech style of a successful Tongan merchant as follows: [She] 'distances herself from Tongan-accented English [...] and all that it represents in the New Zealand context, including the stigma of being an underclass "Islander"' (Besnier 2004: 32). It is useful to note that the per capita Gross Domestic Product of Tonga is \$2,200 (or about 5 per cent that of the United States), less than the typical wages in Ghana, Bolivia or Sri Lanka, for comparison.⁹

As the ATYB bandleader explained, 'The economy in Tonga is slow because parents' first priority is their kids. If a kid gets sick the parent takes time off work. Money comes second, kids come first. You don't need a lot of money in Tonga.' However, other Tongans take a less optimistic view regarding the disparity of wealth in Tonga, and have pressed for democratic reforms, and in some cases even violently protested in recent years. In July 2006, anti-monarchist Tongan Alani Taione allegedly set fire to the Tongan king's Auckland residence in protest. I had visited this home a few months earlier as part of my fieldwork with the band during a welcome ceremony for the king, so this event came as quite a shock. It is quite clear from the context of its performance, that in New Zealand, Tongan band music is used not only to represent Tongan culture generally, but may also indicate de facto support for the monarchy and its religious affiliations.

Religious organizations also play an important role in terms of cultural maintenance among socially disadvantaged migrant communities. Particularly for new migrants, the social support network provided by a church can be of tremendous importance, especially when the church doubles as a cultural centre in which one may speak one's mother tongue and enjoy familiar cultural practices, cuisine and various other traditions. By joining together in religious communities, migrants are able to collaboratively face difficult financial obstacles, and eventually forge new opportunities for themselves and their children in a new land. Music can be an important means of maintaining culture in spite of difficult circumstances.

10. See <http://www.128path.org> and <http://www.honkfest.org> for examples.

Conclusions and implications for community music workers

The findings from this study suggest that community ensembles rooted in musical hybridity may generate innovative models of music learning and play a unique role in cultural preservation. What implications does this have for the fields of community music and music education? In many parts of the world, music educators are increasingly seeking effective ways of accommodating cultural diversity in their music lessons (Campbell et al. 2005). However, as multicultural music education is popularized, there is increasing concern for 'authenticity' in music instruction (Reimer 2002). Despite great interest in promoting established musical traditions from various parts of the world, many music teachers are reluctant to embrace westernized hybrid genres that have a relatively short history for fear that in doing so they may dilute authentic traditions. Such concerns are admirable and there is certainly a need for greater introspection regarding ethical issues within our field. However, it may be that an extremist approach to musical authenticity is nearly as problematic as complete ignorance regarding the issue. Contact between musical cultures, even if it leads to development of a fusion genre, may not necessarily be harmful toward existing traditions. To the contrary, increased cross-cultural contact through music may lead to not only a greater appreciation for other cultures, but a renewed sense of the global value of local traditions. Indeed, the efficacy of intercultural exchange among music ensembles from diverse communities has already been demonstrated in New Zealand (Phoasavadi and Hebert 2006), as has the cultural value of recent musical fusions (Taiepa 2006).

In its 'natural' community context, the ATYB performs a diverse range of musical styles, but perhaps if forced into an educational setting such bands would be expected to limit themselves to music that seems most explicitly 'Tongan' in origin. Ironically, such endorsement of 'authenticity' might actually produce outcomes that are more unnatural than natural. Perhaps the focus of such educational concerns should shift to the natural relationship between the kind of music played and the natural context of its performance. Such approaches have long been advocated by music scholars such as Charles Keil and Reebee Garofalo in their multicultural community brass band endeavours.¹⁰ Clearly, a band such as Auckland Tongan Youth Brass may perform 'Touch Me Baby One More Time' at a parade or picnic, but it never would do so for a Tongan funeral. Such is the true state of genuine musical authenticity, in its natural community music context. Music educators may still have much to learn from careful study of community music ensembles, and so much more remains to be done in order to offer

such ensembles the support they deserve. Community music ensembles are also likely to provide many important insights into how school music education may be made more culturally relevant in the future.

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Suggested citation

Hebert, D.G. (2008), 'Music transmission in an Auckland Tongan community youth band', *International Journal of Community Music* 1: 2, pp. 169–188, doi: 10.1386/ijcm.1.2.169/1

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