

SEARCHING FOR VOICE, SEARCHING FOR REO¹

The Journey of a Bicultural Composer

Te Ahukaramū

Charles Royal

Tēnā koutou katoa.

My thanks to the Alexander Turnbull Library and to the Lilburn Trust for the invitation to speak this evening. I am honoured by this invitation to share with you some of my adventures and experiments in the world of music composition and music generally.

I've had a rather unconventional career as a composer. It has not been straight forward but then again, who's is? I studied composition in the 1980s at the then Victoria University of Wellington Department of Music. My composition teachers were Jack Body, Ross Harris and David Farquhar. Alan Thomas, too, was one of my important teachers.

Music School was a rich and exciting time for me. I had many formative musical experiences and met important musical figures such as Peter Sculthorpe of Australia, Lou Harrison of the United States and our own Douglas Lilburn during Friday evening visits to his Thorndon cottage. I recall the Asia-Pacific Music Festivals here in Wellington, collaborations with our performance students and summer Shakespeares (for which I composed music) among many other things.

During my time at music school, however, I went through an identity crisis. After a long period of resisting my Māori identity, I found myself suddenly wanting to know it and in a deep way. Young people today might find it surprising to learn that back then, it was not at all cool to be Māori. Being Māori was not a source of pride. Instead, it was something to hide and it is a source of shame to me that I did use the paleness of my skin to hide myself as a Māori person.

However, as I say, I got to a point where I could not deny myself any further, and I fell into what felt like, at the time, a raging torrent of identity, of confusion, of conscientisation, of anger and emotion. I finished my time at music school, not particularly well I might add, and plunged myself into the Māori world. I left Wellington for Ōtaki where my father had become heavily involved in the establishment of Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa. I learnt as much as I could and as quickly as I could. I devoured the reo, kōrero, waiata, karakia, whakapapa, haka and more. You could say that I got lost in the Māori world and happily so.

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Looking back now, I can see that I did not want a superficial understanding. I wanted to gain some kind of mastery, authority, whatever that meant or turned out to be. I wanted to feel confident in my Māori identity.

During that period - from about 1991 to 2005 - I still made music and was involved in music. During the early 1990s, for example, I served on Pūatatangi, the music committee of the old QE II Arts Council. It was under the auspices of this committee that, among other things, we ran an important hui on taonga pūoro at Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa in 1994. This was the hui that launched the well known *Te Kū Te Whē*, the landmark taonga pūoro CD by Hirini Melbourne and Richard Nunns. During this time, I also played in bands, collaborated with other musicians and served several stints on either the Board or the composers committee of SOUNZ, the centre for New Zealand music.

RECLAIMING MYSELF AS A COMPOSER

It was in 2005, however, that I returned to formal composition. When I did so, I found that the first thing I wished to do, was to simply reclaim myself as a composer. So I composed a small piece for violin and piano called 'Reclamations'. The title reflects this reclaiming of myself as a composer achieved through many actions, many reclamations, both large and small.

The piece was also composed for my friend Elena, a violinist from Ngāti Kahungunu, who, like me, had spent a significant period of time away from music before reclaiming herself too as a musician. Here is an extract from a 2010 performance of the piece featuring Lara Hall on violin and Rafaela Garlick-Grice on piano:

1. RECLAMATIONS (1:08)

Around the same time, I was also composing new Māori language popular music with the support of Te Māngai Pāho, the Māori language broadcasting funding agency. Since approximately 1996, they had been contracting musicians to create Māori language music, largely song, for broadcast purposes. I completed my first contract for them in 1997, and in 2006 I completed another. Here is an extract from a song called 'Taranga' and featuring singer Toni Huata and I am playing the instruments:

2. TARANGA (0.45)

In composing this music, my interest was not so much in addressing the compositional opportunities and challenges of bringing music composition and the Māori world together. At that time, my interest was simply to compose music and have it played.

In 2007, I found myself stuck in an airport for a day. I had hours to spare, did not know what to do with myself, and so I opened my laptop and began to compose some music responding to the great movement of people around me and throughout the terminal building. I love airports - that sense of imminent adventure, of being out of my usual time and space, my usual life, that sense of people coming and going, and the great diversity of the world. I love the energy of airports.

So I began to compose a piece with these thoughts in mind. It eventually became 'Dance' for piano, strings and percussion. Here is an extract from a 2013 performance of the work by the Lake Superior Chamber Orchestra performing in Duluth, Minnesota, in the United States. The conductor is Warren Friesen.

3. DANCE, (0.52)

I would like to play one further example of music which illustrates this phase of 'reclaiming' myself as a composer. Here is an extract from a work called 'Baxter Songs' for baritone and piano. I was introduced to the poetry of James K Baxter by my very first composition teacher, Father Bruce Goodman at St Patrick's College, Silverstream. I was hooked instantly. I love the romantic spirit in some of Baxter's work and his passionate way of speaking about life here in these islands, in our island home.

When, in 2010 and 2011, I was asked to compose and perform at a number of events including the LATE events, at Auckland Museum, I took the opportunity to collaborate with my friend, the baritone Howard McGuire (also from Ngāti Kahungunu) and set three of Baxter's poems to music. Here is an extract from High Country Weather, Let Time be Still and Stephanie:

4. BAXTER SONGS, (5:03)

WHY COMPOSE?

So why compose? What is it about or for? Why do I compose? What am I trying to achieve?

I have thought a lot about these questions and I find that they are like all big, life questions - there are many ways to answer them. I could offer theories and explanations that might be intellectually satisfying but the answer that touches me the most is this: I compose because it is in me to compose. I do not know why it is in me, I do not know where it comes from. All I know is, simply, that it is in me to do so.

I also know I have an ongoing need for it to come out. I am not satisfied if it stays within me, unexpressed, unnoticed, uncared for. In fact, it feels like slow death if I am not able to act upon this thing within me. I have a need to express myself and in this way.

I love composing music. I love the journey of imagining and feeling something inside myself and bringing it out into the world, of working on it and passing it to competent musicians to perform and bring to life. This is where I would spend all my time if I could.

I guess I have known this about myself all my life. When I was 13 years old, I began learning the trumpet. During each class, our teacher would give us homework which usually meant learning a melody of some kind. Later, when practicing at home, I would learn the melody quickly because I wanted to move on to play other notes I could feel within me. I could feel those notes swelling, demanding attention, wanting to get out. However, I was limited, held back, by my inability to physically manipulate the instrument.

Sometime later I found myself imagining things for other instruments too, instruments I did not play. I would listen to a cello or a flute, for example, and I found myself imagining something for those instruments as well. When I came into regular contact with players at music school who were proficient on their instruments, I found myself composing as they played. I would ask them, "Could you play this this way?" and then I would say to another, "if you could play this when she plays that" and "What about if we did this?" and so on. There was always something suggesting itself within me.

On almost all occasions, however, the composition I feel within me is incomplete. Unless one is a Mozart, most compositions begin life as an impulse, a seed, a suggestion, a hint. This is the beginning of the composition process. Sometimes too the impulse or hint comes through listening or seeing something else. My inner world awakens or resonates with something I've seen or experienced outwardly and this prompts me into action.

Once an impulse or an idea has arrived, I then sit down to work on it. And this can take a while. Most of the composition process is actually a search, a hunt. What I call panning for gold. A little something might catch my ear which stimulates me, a small phrase perhaps that I like and I will start working on it. Playing it over and over again and soon a suggestion comes for a direction. Composers in the audience will know how much composition is actually a lot of work - the initial inspiration, the search for more, the refining, the refining, the search for more and so on.

So to answer the question, I compose because it is in me to compose - both the music itself and the desire for it to come out.

Now, during the period of reclaiming myself as a composer, I came to a key realisation. One day, I was trying very hard to compose and I wasn't getting anywhere. I had composer's block and I was frustrated. I turned and turned, when suddenly I noticed that I was thinking a lot about what a composer is or ought to be, what a composition

is and ought to be. I discovered that I was preoccupied with what the music ought to sound like rather than what it was actually sounding like, what my inner voice was offering to me. “It’s not Boulez enough, or Takemitsu or Sculthorpe”, I would say to myself. I would compose something, play it back and criticise myself terribly as it did not sound what I thought it ought to sound like at that point. The breakthrough came when I finally said to myself “for god’s sake, stop being a composer!” When I said that to myself, I knew intuitively that it was correct. Something in me responded to this idea.

I saw that I was trying to be a composer. I was trying to fill a role and in doing so, I could not hear the music. Trying to be a composer, in this sense, was about being dominated by a preoccupation to compare myself with others. Being a composer was about being oppressed by certain aesthetic expectations that I myself held of what it means to be a modern composer. Always listen for the music and don’t prejudge what it is and could be.

Ironically, now that I have reclaimed myself as a composer, I am now no longer concerned about being a composer or not. Rather, I am more concerned with the truth of my experience, the truth of my inner voice. And the truth is I have music in me that wishes to make its way into the world.

5. E KORE E MUTU (2:35)

MĀTAURANGA MĀORI APPROACHES TO COMPOSITION

That was an extract from a piece called ‘E kore e mutu’ performed by the Auckland University Chamber Choir in 2013 and conducted by Karen Grylls. It uses a Māori text which I too composed, a matter that will return to later in this lecture.

‘E kore e mutu’ is an example of perhaps the simplest kind of encounter possible between Māori elements with so-called western classical composition - using a Māori language text in a fairly conventional choral work. But the possibilities, challenges and opportunities of this kind of encounter are far more nuanced and ambitious than this. And although these possibilities have been with me for a long time, I feel that I am only now beginning to address them in a more conscious and deliberate way. Let me explain what I mean.

When I left music school all those years ago, I told myself to seek a music indigenous to Aotearoa. To that point I had been aping European art music rather badly. The realisation that that indeed was what I was doing together with a new found desire for my Māori identity pushed me in search of a music that grew from this soil, arose from these islands and spoke to our experiences here in Aotearoa.

To cut a very long story short, the indigenous music I found in Aotearoa was the ‘reo’ itself. Now today when we use the term reo, it is most often used to mean the Māori language. But reo means voice and includes many kinds of voices - the human

voice, bird song, wind, thunder, taonga pūoro, and much more. Reo is an approach to music which centres on the voice and the voices of the natural world. This idea is reflected in many places in our literature and culture. For example, when one performs a pātere (a traditional chant with a fast tempo) one is asked to emulate the rapids in a fast flowing river. When one performs a ngeri, a haka like chant, one is to perform like a tempestuous wind. This is in keeping with the indigenous nature of the traditional Māori worldview, the tangata whenua worldview. The natural world is the model for all things.

Now, it wasn't too long after my entry into the Māori world that I began to compose under its influence. I composed mōteatea or chanted song poetry, two being waiata tangi for my elders, Rev Māori Marsden of Te Tai Tokerau and Tūkawekai Kereama of Ngāti Raukawa. I also composed a waiata to commemorate the arrival of taonga pūoro to Ōtaki for the 1994 hui I mentioned earlier. These mōteatea were the beginning of my composition experiments drawing solely on the music material I found in the Māori world.

I continued in this vein particularly in the period 2010-2014 when I lead four whare tapere on our whānau papakāinga at a place called Waimangō in Hauraki. Whare Tapere are iwi based 'houses' of storytelling, music, dance, games and other entertainments. As part of the whare tapere, I created a music group named 'Reo' which we stylised as the 'house band' of the whare tapere. The group comprised myself with singer Erina Daniels, taonga pūoro experts James Webster, Horomona Horo and Al Fraser and digital music extraordinaire Paddy Free. Now, I cannot claim sole composition credit for the music we created - for I had these splendid musicians around me. However, I was responsible for the chanting, the Māori language employed and acted generally as Music Director for the group.

The first example of what we might call new mātauranga Māori approaches to music making is a mantra, a chant upon the godhead, entitled 'Āio' which means peace. We performed this piece on a number of occasions both within Whare Tapere and elsewhere too:

6. ĀIO, (0:55)

A second example is 'Rangimārire', a waiata inspired by Buddhist chant. The title of the piece also translates as peace.

7. RANGIMĀRIRE (0:58)

A third example was composed for a dance work called *Te Kārohirohi: The Light Dances*, a collaboration between myself and choreographer Louise Pōtiki-Bryant. It featured in the 2010, 2011 and 2012 whare tapere. It is called 'Tautapatapa' and is a ritual, chanting the creation of the world.

8. TAUTAPATAPA (1:05)

Finally, the following waiata was also used in the dance work, *Te Kārohirohi*. It tells of a person sitting under a tree sending their voice or reo out into the world:

9. TE TAKE O TE RĀKAU (1:11)

These are examples of music we created during our time with the whare tapere. One of the key things I learnt from this experience and being a composer in this context, was my sense of being responsible, of being a vehicle for my culture. I was not an ethnomusicologist or an anthropologist studying a culture that I did not belong to. Rather, I was and am a member of that culture, of an iwi. I was attempting to create something of meaning and significance to my people, to our whole experience and history, and not just to me as a composer. In this way, I had left the model that tended to see music as sound phenomenon only - to understand the social and cultural context in which my music making could be positioned.

CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTER

Now, interestingly enough, one of the very first opportunities I received to explore cross-cultural composition was not in the field of so-called western classical and Māori music but rather in an encounter between Chinese musical instruments and mōteatea, traditional Māori song poetry. In 2009, I was invited by Jack Body to be a member of a New Zealand music delegation to participate in a world music festival at the Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing, China. Dame Gillian Whitehead was our delegation leader and Jack encouraged me to compose music with some of the conservatory students and using Chinese musical instruments. Here is a brief extract from a performance in the main auditorium at the Conservatory.

10. BEIJING MŌTEATEA (0:55)

The first piece I wrote which represents a bringing together of the orchestra together with a voice that is somewhat influenced by traditional mōteatea, is a work I first composed all the way back in 1991 but reworked again in 2008. This piece was composed as an homage to the late Māori Queen, Te Arikinui Te Atairangikāhu, and here is an extract from a 2010 performance featuring Howard McGuire with the Waikato University Orchestra. The conductor is Adam Maha and the text is by Tīmoti Kāretu:

11. TE ARIKINUI (1:15)

Finally, earlier this year, the Manukau Symphony Orchestra performed my latest work, 'Whitiora' for solo cello, chanting voice and orchestra. This piece brings together elements of mōteatea together with the orchestra. In my mind, it is not yet

getting to where I think I could be, but it gives an indication nonetheless of the direction I am taking. The piece was composed as contemplation upon the 19th century conflicts of colonial New Zealand and our contemporary journeys toward peace and reconciliation.

12. WHITIORA (2:30)

REFLECTIONS OF A BICULTURAL COMPOSER

So, as you can see and hear, my journey as a composer has been varied and somewhat stop/start. I have tried many things and have had my ups and downs. I have struggled with being a composer and with being Māori. I have also struggled with my multiple roles. I'm not just a composer, but I am also a son, a father, a husband, a grandfather. I am also a writer, researcher, teacher, organiser and more. It has never been my lot to be purely, simply and only a composer and occasionally I have despaired as to how I can attend to them all in a tangible and meaningful way.

Preparing this lecture has been a gift in that it has inspired me to highlight the truth of my experiences to myself, to understand them more and to strengthen me yet further in my journey. Of course, the journey is by no means at an end for, as I said earlier, I feel like only now am I getting into the position of yielding the composition opportunities before me. It feels like a new beginning.

Just as I had a breakthrough in my thinking about what it is to be a composer, I had a similar breakthrough in thinking about being Māori. I have said to myself, "stop being Māori, that's about filling a role, not finding the music." In each of these ideas, these admonitions, I am saying to myself, stop looking elsewhere for any kind of model of what I could be. Rather, focus on what I already am. Listen for the music and use the tools around me to express this music.

I need to say that when I began to learn Māori and aspects of my Māori identity and heritage, I was very much preoccupied with 'being Māori'. This was forceful in my consciousness. However, later, as I gained fluency in my language and culture, and I became confident in my Māori identity, I became more open to the world and to the possibilities around me. I felt less threatened and more open toward others, more willing to contribute to broader society. This is why New Zealand must continue to invest in the revitalisation of Māori language and culture among Māori people for it diminishes feelings of unworthiness and increases confidence and self-worth in Māori leading to an openness and desire to contribute to the world at large. This has been my experience.

I think that where I am actually going to get to is a place where so-called western composition and the Māori world come together into some kind of new and hopefully satisfying whole. It is possible that I am already there but do not know it yet. This is not merely about placing these two things alongside one another but rather about

honouring both, giving each their own space and their due, and creating a third space where the two may come together in some kind of positive and creative encounter and whole.

For these reasons, I am more interested now in the idea of interculturalism rather than biculturalism. To my mind at least, interculturalism is about creating and enabling positive, creative and mutually enhancing encounters between cultures. Creating things of value together. Biculturalism is not explicit enough, I think, in this regard.

I happen to think that this, too, is the future for the Treaty of Waitangi. We will continue to appeal to the Treaty as an instrument for the alleviation of grievance and rightfully so. However, new possibilities are opening up with respect to what could be created through a positive, creative encounter between tino rangatiratanga and kāwanatanga, between Māori and the Crown, between Māori and Pākehā. I feel this 'third intercultural way' really is the way forward with the Treaty, the post-Treaty settlement future.

To get there, however, we will need aroha filled, compassionate, creative and open people from all walks of life.

BEING TRUE TO ONESELF: BEYOND BICULTURALISM

As you can hear from my discussion this evening, my journey as a composer and as a person has been less and less about meeting certain expectations and filling certain roles to be more and more about getting to the truth of myself. These days I like to speak about how important it is to be native or indigenous to oneself - a version or way of speaking to the need to be authentic with oneself, to live an authentic life.

Do not get me wrong. Learning to be a composer, pursuing my Māori identity (and other identities) has been and continues to be important to me. They are a critical part of the journey. But I understand now how these were and are stepping stones to some deeper reality and possibility the features of which I have yet to fully realise and understand but whose promise delights and inspires me.

The truth is I have music in me that seeks to be expressed in the world - and when it does, I feel like I am truly alive and doing what I am here to do.

I am a product of both Māori and Pākehā, not purely one or other, and my dream is find the voice, the unique reo that resides in the intersection between the two. I could be an example of the positive encounter between Māori and Pākehā but the ability to say that I am an intercultural composer is not what pleases me. Rather, what inspires me is the music and my ability to express it in the world through the diverse

cultural tools available to me, drawn from my Māori and Pākehā backgrounds and which collectively form my instrument.

My compositional practice has broadened to include poetry and story so that now there is a literary dimension to my composing. I find myself composing texts in both Māori and English and they sit seamlessly alongside my music. I very much enjoy doing this. Finally, I am also conscious of the social dimensions of my work. More and more I am drawn to ways which my music and writing can contribute to life around me and to my community.

CONCLUSION

I would like to end with one final piece. This piece is from my forthcoming 'play with music' entitled 'Ūkaipō: Our Struggles, with Love'. One of the characters in the story, Māia, is struggling with her identity. She does not know who her father is and his absence is the central pain and dilemma of her life. She deeply wants to know who he is. Interestingly enough, although her father's rejection of her remains a great void for her, in many ways she has actually great knowledge of herself.

This waiata is called 'He aha tōku hē?' or "What did I do wrong?". The singer is Ria Hall accompanied by members of the Manukau Symphony Orchestra.

Tēnā koutou katoa.

13. HE AHA TŌKŪ HĒ? (3:55)

Searching for Voice, Searching for Reo

Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal

2017 Lilburn Memorial Lecture, National Library, 2 November 2017

List of Music Examples

1. *'Reclamations'* for violin and piano, 2006

Extract from a performance by Lara Hall (violin) and Rafaela Garlick-Grice (piano), 21 April 2010. WEL Energy Academy of Performing Arts, Waikato University, Hamilton.
(<https://youtu.be/ieXfTO7QjTU>)

2. *Taranga*, 2006

Performed by Toni Huata (vocals) and Charles Royal (instruments)
Appears on 'Ascension and Other Stories: Songs by Charles Royal'.
Available on iTunes and Spotify.

3. *'Dance'* for piano, strings and percussion, 2007

Extracted from a performance by the Lake Superior Chamber Orchestra, Duluth, Minnesota, USA, conducted by Warren Friesson, 10 July 2014.
(<https://youtu.be/NPgScbhl0uY>)

4. *'Baxter Songs'* for baritone and piano, 2010

Extracted from a recording featuring Howard McGuire (baritone) and Charles Royal (piano). Recorded at Auckland Museum, Auckland 2013.
(<https://youtu.be/Xd8jyKypFuE>)

5. *'E Kore e mutu'* for SATB choir,

Auckland University Chamber Choir, conducted by Karen Grylls, 2013

6. *Āio*

A chant performed by Charles Royal with the music group called 'Reo' comprising Erina Daniels, James Webster, Horomona Horo, Al Fraser and Paddy Free

7. *Rangimārire*

A chant performed by Charles Royal with the music group called 'Reo' comprising Erina Daniels, James Webster, Horomona Horo, Al Fraser and Paddy Free

8. *Tautapatapa*

A chant performed by Charles Royal with the music group called 'Reo' comprising Erina Daniels, James Webster, Horomona Horo, Al Fraser and Paddy Free

9. *Te Take o te rākau*

A chant performed by Charles Royal with the music group called 'Reo' comprising Erina Daniels, James Webster, Horomona Horo, Al Fraser and Paddy Free

10. *Beijing Mōteatea, 2009*

Performed by Charles Royal and students of the Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing, China, 2009

11. *'Te Arikinui' for tenor, strings and percussion (1991, rev. 2008)*

Performed by Howard McGuire (tenor) with the Waikato University Orchestra conducted by Adam Maha. WEL Energy Academy of Performing Arts, Waikato University, Hamilton. 21 April 2010.

12. *'Whitiora' for solo cello, chanting voice and orchestra*

Performed by the Manukau Symphony Orchestra featuring Charles Royal (voice) and Miriam Hartmann (cello), conducted by Tianyi Li. Vodafone Events Centre, Manukau, Auckland City. 24 June 2017.

13. *'He aha tōku hē?' (2015)*

Featuring singer Ria Hall and musicians from the Manukau Symphony Orchestra. Recorded at RoundHead Studios, Auckland City, from a forthcoming 'play with music' entitled *Ūkaipō: Our Struggles, with Love*.

*E kīia ana, ko te aroha te mea nui
Engari, he wā ka mahue, ka ngaro.*

*It is said that love is the greatest thing.
There are times, however, when it is lost.*

*Tēnei au e kimi noa ana
Ki te take i pēnei ai.
E kore ia e aroha ki ahau
Tāna uri ki tēnei Ao?*

*Here I am seeking, searching
Why is it like this?
Why will he not acknowledge me
His daughter?*

*He whakamā, he aniutanga kua tau
Mōku nei, mō tōku whānautanga
Ki tēnei Ao.*

*He is embarrassed, ashamed
Of me and my birth
Into this world.*

*E te matua, e mau tō ngoi
Me mutu te huna.
Tuturu, he aha te utu
O te tika, (o) te pono?*

*Father, find your strength
Do not remain hidden.
Truly, what is the cost
Of the truth?*

*He aha tōku hē?
I hara nei au ki hea?*

*What was my mistake?
Where did I go wrong?*