

DAD LOVES HIS RUGBY, MUM’S A TAXI, AND I THINK SCHOOL IS REALLY COOL: NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE *KIWI KIDSONGS* SERIES

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Children’s music is not a genre that has been widely examined in New Zealand. While music education trends have been explored,² children’s songs within the curriculum have not. This study examines a collection of children’s songs created especially for New Zealand primary schools: the *Kiwi Kidsongs* (*KKs*) series. Ethnomusicologists have noted connection between children’s songs and identity; in terms of both acquisition of musical style,³ and cultural significance.⁴ At the same time, popular music is part of current discourse—in regard to its relationship to identity formation, and its importance as an “indicator of cultural identity, operating at the levels of the self, community, and the nation.”⁵ While the songs in *KKs* are not popular music in the strictest sense of the term, they can be viewed as such because the series incorporates songs in various popular

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² See, for example, Trevor Thwaites, “Music Education in a New Key: The Dissonance of Competence, Connectedness, Culture and Curriculum,” *New Zealand Journal of Research in Performing Arts and Education: Nga Mahi a Rehia* 1 (2008), <http://www.drama.org.nz/ejournal>; and Janet Mansfield, “The Arts in the New Zealand: From Policy to Practice” (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2000).

³ Alan Lomax, “Musical Style and Context,” *American Anthropologist* 61 (1959): 927-54.

⁴ John Blacking, *Venda Children’s Songs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) and Patricia Sheehan Campbell, *Songs in their Heads* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁵ Roy Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 220.

idioms (e.g., rap, rock, and country rock) as well as utilizing some songs which were originally pop songs (for example, Split Enz' "Six Months in a Leaky Boat" and "Nature" by The Muttonbirds).

This paper examines the national identity that is being both created and represented in this musical resource for New Zealand school children. While *KKs* is a resource largely designed to develop classroom singing, its title, the fact that all pieces are New Zealand compositions, and its state funded/nationwide status also suggest that it is a resource designed to convey a sense of national identity. This study is an introductory exploration of the themes relating to identity present in *KKs*.

Background

KKs was first produced in 1990 and has been released every year since. It is a series of musical resources, unique to New Zealand, and distributed free to all schools throughout the country which have students at year 0-8. Learning Media, the publishing branch of the Ministry of Education, is responsible for the production and distribution of this resource. The exact format of the resource has changed over the years, reflecting changes in technology. *KKs 1* was issued as a cassette tape, for instance, with CDs not being used until *KKs 9*. Other formats have included a DVD and an enhanced CD. The songs are always prepared in two versions: one with vocals and one without.

Janice Marriott, who has been involved with the series since its inception, and has been its producer since *KKs 5*, says that it is primarily a resource designed to encourage children to sing together, and the defining characteristic of the series is the recording quality.⁶ Certainly, the recordings are of a professional standard, reflecting Marriott's background in the Audio Production Unit of Learning Media. She states that the primary characteristics of the songs are that they are all written by New Zealand songwriters, are easy to sing along to, and appeal to children.

Being an educational resource, the series has also responded to the changing curriculum. The initial *KKs* came with "a leaflet of notes"⁷ and this has developed over the years to become a handbook of notes for teachers, sheet music, OHP designed lyric sheets, direct links to the curriculum, and now connections to the integrated arts curriculum (dance, drama, music, and the visual arts). *KKs 16* reflects this approach to the arts

⁶ Janice Marriott, e-mail message to author, February 25, 2008. The author would like to acknowledge and thank Janice Marriott for her contribution to this article.

⁷ Marriott, e-mail message to author, February 24, 2008.

and includes opportunities to expand into other areas, such as dance and drama. This sixteenth edition in the series is also significant because it is Pacific-themed. This, together with *KKs 15* (which is a collection of ten *waiata*), and the incidental songs from Māori and Pacific cultures that have been included in the series are indicative of its bicultural and multicultural nature. Marriott suggests that *KKs* reflects the “ethnic make up of New Zealand school children.”⁸

This study is focused on the *Kiwi Kidsongs Collection* which came out in 2000 and is a twenty-two song compilation of popular songs from *KKs 1-9*. Part of the rationale for the *Collection* was that teachers were unable to order some of the older *KKs* because they were out of stock and Learning Media were often being asked for them.⁹ Consequently, a questionnaire was sent out to all the schools who had contacted them over the years about *KKs* and the schools were asked to vote for their twenty favourites, from a list of all the songs.¹⁰ The result is the *Collection* which has a total of twenty-two songs. It has been used for this study because it represents the favourites: the most popular, well known, and therefore potentially the most sung, of the *KKs* songs.

Music and Identity

When discussing Australian identity in music, Turner suggests that it is a “waste of time”¹¹ looking for signifiers of Australianness in music texts. He says works are Australian on the basis of being produced, consumed, and performed there. However, Hayes believes that there is a recognisably Australian music, because of the country’s unique history, location, geography, and other factors.¹² Identity can also be constructed in terms of images: of Australia’s history (indigenous beginnings, convict past, recent moves towards diversity), and of its geographic features (the land, the

⁸ Marriott, e-mail message to author, February 25, 2008.

⁹ Marriott, e-mail message to author, February 24, 2008.

¹⁰ “Teacher’s Handbook,” *Kiwi Kidsongs Collection* (Wellington: Learning Media, 2000), 3.

¹¹ Graeme Turner, “Australian Popular Music and its Contexts,” in *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism: Popular Music and Australian Culture from the 1960s to 1990s*, ed. Phillip Hayward (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 17.

¹² Quoted in Scott Harrison, “Who’ll come a Waltzing Matilda? The Search for Identity in Australian Music Education,” in *Cultural Diversity in Music Education: Directions and Challenges for the 21st Century*, eds. Patricia Shehan-Campbell et al. (Brisbane: Australian Academic Press, 2005), 117.

weather, the outback).¹³ This can be translated to the concept of national identity in New Zealand also; to a certain extent, our identity is associated through images of our historical and geographic features. These have developed to become national icons such as the Buzzy Bee, the gumboot, pavlovas, and summers at the beach.

Harrison examines some iconic Australian songs from the popular music canon.¹⁴ For example, “Sounds of Then (This is Australia),” refers to humidity, lightning flashes, and the cane fields. This references a recognizable Australian occurrence. Likewise, “Down Under,” with the lyrics “I come from a land down under/Where beer does flow and men chunder.” While not implying that all men in Australia drink excessively and vomit, Harrison sees the strong association of this song with the America’s Cup win in 1983, together with its lyrical content, connecting “the fascination with sport, the concept of the underdog, toughness and humour.”¹⁵

Dave Dobbyn’s song “Loyal” can be viewed in a similar way in New Zealand culture. It has been associated with an America’s Cup campaign (in 2003) as well as with rugby in New Zealand. For example, Dave Dobbyn sang it on a Sports Café programme to farewell All Blacks’ captain Sean Fitzpatrick.¹⁶ Harrison is searching for an identity in Australian music education and raises more questions than he answers. His main argument seems to be that only by recognizing cultural diversity in Australian music education, will music education in Australia become truly Australian.

In a New Zealand context, Shuker looks at national identity from a number of levels or layers: through the use of music consumption to indicate cultural capital, especially in subcultures (such as schools); community identity, through notions of local sounds and scenes; and national identity, through cultural policies aimed at promoting locally produced music.¹⁷ *KKs* in some ways exemplifies this latter layer. It is certainly aimed at promoting locally produced music. A further element in Shuker’s framework is association of particular genres and settings; he refers to the “Dunedin sound,” and in *KKs* there are elements of this to consider. Shuker also notes that songwriters use themes of homeland and the nation to both situate and authenticate their music.

¹³ Harrison, “Who’ll come a Waltzing Matilda?,” 117.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁶ The D-Files, “Recent sightings”, comment posted May, 1998, <http://www.geocities.com/belltower.geo/where.htm>.

¹⁷ Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music Culture*, 220.

The Songs

Of the twenty-two songs on the *Kiwi Kidsongs Collection*, six have no discernable New Zealand aspects: “School is Number One,” “Hey Crocodile!,” “Pirate Band,” “Edith the Elf,” “Silly Hat Store,” and “The Brontosaurus Boogie”. There are no references to anything local in these songs; rather, they are based on children’s themes, and can be regarded as purely children’s songs.

The next group of songs to consider have surface references in the lyrics to aspects of New Zealand identity/culture. “Fish and Chips,” for example, has the lyric “I like peanut butter on my bread/Maybe marmite and honey instead,” reflecting aspects of New Zealand culinary culture. The song “My Mum’s a Taxi” is a song many New Zealand parents would be able to relate to. It details the life of a busy New Zealand mum, driving her children to various daytime and after school activities, expressed in lyrics such as “and John to kindergarten and the baby to the crèche” and “on Tuesday there is netball and karate for Mark.” “Sausages and Custard” is a rather humorous song that focuses on the culinary experience of a family dog that only gets leftovers mixed together. He longs for “Pal and Champ and Jellymeat,” rather than cold pizza mixed in with last week’s roast. This song has references to both common “human” food in New Zealand, as well as dog food. The All Blacks, New Zealand’s iconic rugby team, and John Hart (a former coach of the All Blacks) are referred to in “My Dad Loves his Rugby.” This song also reflects on a familiar sight on Saturday mornings throughout New Zealand: that of parents standing on the side lines watching their kids play sport.

Language is also a significant feature on the *Kiwi Kidsongs Collection* in terms of reflecting New Zealand identity. There are three songs that are wholly in Māori (“Koromiko,” “Mauria Mai Taku Wai,” and “Uira”) as well as a song that is in Samoan (“Le ‘Aute”). There are two songs that contain both Māori and English lyrics (“Y2K” and “Yesterday Tomorrow”) and one song that has lyrics in Māori, English, and Samoan (“Copycat Rap”). The use of *te reo* and Samoan, together with English, reflects both biculturalism and an element of multiculturalism.

From the Country to the Beach and into Space

“Going Down to the Country” is a song about growing up in rural New Zealand. The lyrics provide images of country life, reflecting on and recognizing the children who grow up on farms all over New Zealand. The style of this song is also significant: it is a country song, reflecting a part of our musical heritage/identity. Country music is a strong part of musical communities throughout New Zealand, such as Gore.¹⁸ The rivalry that exists in New Zealand between “townies” and those who live in rural areas is apparent in lines such as “spent my money on junk food, down at the corner dairy/I’d rather have a square meal in my belly,” and “I’ve got Band-Aids on my knees, from falling on the concrete/I’d rather play out in the hay instead.” Along with Band Aids, gumboots and milking cows, television is referred to as “telly”; all examples of language which evokes a sense of national identity and, in the case of the latter, our British roots.

“Never Hitch a Ride with a Martian” also has examples of idiomatic language: the use of phrases such as “me and my cobbors,” and “me and my mates.” This song refers to a local place, Raetihi, a small town in the central North Island, as well as to the macrocarpa tree which, while not a New Zealand native, is nevertheless a species that is prevalent here. This song is in the style of a country/folk/ballad/yarn such as those found in New Zealand and Australia. Somewhat ironically, the accompanying notes for this song suggest that it is in the style of Slim Dusty, who is an Australian. This, perhaps, is an indication of our rivalry and our connection to Australia: we are simultaneously linked to Australia through our shared colonial past, but at the same time struggle to assert our own sense of identity.

“Christmas on the Beach” is a song that challenges the Americanization of Christmas. “We don’t want no holly or mistletoe/We don’t want no Christmas tree with artificial snow/We don’t want no snowman, made of cotton wool/We’re not a bunch of fools” proclaim the lyrics. This is a song about celebrating Christmas in New Zealand. It reflects a postcolonial New Zealand identity: the traditional pine tree has been replaced by a *pōhutukawa* tree. Many of the traditional Christmas songs sung in New Zealand represent the white Northern Hemisphere idea of Christmas (such as “Deck the Halls” and “White Christmas”). This song celebrates a Kiwi kid’s Christmas. The accompanying notes suggest that teachers utilize other “symbols of a NZ summer” in a musical way (such as

¹⁸ See, for example, Dan Bendrups and Henry Johnson, “Gore Gold Guitars: The Place of Country in New Zealand,” *Perfect Beat* 8, no. 3 (2007): 52-67.

cricket bats, sunglasses, tupperware, a chilly bin),¹⁹ also reinforcing the sense of identity in this song.

The song “Yesterday Tomorrow,” as mentioned above, uses both English and *te reo*. The lyrical content is also reflective of Māori spiritual elements; it refers to the creation story and *Papatuanuku*, the earth mother. The second verse outlines the colonial history of New Zealand, while the final verse is based around New Zealand today: the message is about looking after our country through preservation and conservation. *Taonga puoro* are used on this track, giving it a sound quality that is distinctively New Zealand.

Conclusion

To return to Turner: this music is New Zealand music because it is created, produced, and consumed here. *KKs* relates to the different levels of national identity that Shuker outlined. At the state/national level it is significant to national identity because it is funded by the government, through the Ministry of Education. At the subcultural level, *KKs* is significant because it forms a kind of shared and recognizable repertoire for primary school children throughout New Zealand. The songs represent a category of cultural capital at the subcultural level of the school.

In *KKs*, songs are littered with references to places and people and things that are distinctly part of New Zealand culture, as well as having a sense of locality in terms of themes that New Zealand children can relate to. Just as Harrison noted the references to cane fields and humidity in Australian songs gave them a sense of Australianness, songs about growing up in the country, spending Christmas at the beach, and referring to Māori creation mythology provide images and themes that give these songs a sense of national identity for New Zealand school children. There is also a strong sense of identity through the use of language: Māori and Samoan languages can be heard in many of the songs on the *Collection*, and some editions of *KKs* have focused solely on Māori and Pacific songs.

While there is recognition and representation of Māori, Pacific, colonial, and postcolonial roots, which reflect a certain level of cultural diversity, it should be noted that the *Kiwi Kidsongs Collection* is absent of recognition of any Asian cultures in New Zealand.

Janice Marriott has said that there is no typical Kiwi Kidsong. The few examples examined here reflect this. Scott Harrison suggested that

¹⁹ “Teacher’s Handbook,” *Kiwi Kidsongs Collection*, 5.

only when Australian music education acknowledged and represented its cultural diversity would it truly represent its national identity. I think that perhaps, with *KKs*, New Zealand is on its way to doing just that.

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