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Pacific Congruences: cultural Influences in the music of contemporary New Zealand composers.

Cultural influences help to define and redefine creative thinking within a given society, and it is the act of creation that is the impetus for the large amount of musicological scholarship in this area. Perhaps due to the relative geographical isolation of this country, New Zealand composers have inherited and developed a musical culture that embraces a diversity of musical styles and influences, and has largely avoided following any specific stylistic “school” of composition. From the initial influence of the British musical traditions brought to New Zealand by the first European settlers, contemporary classical music in New Zealand now contains a unique mixture of influences, including traditional Maori music and instruments (Taonga Pūoro), and musical influences from Asia, America, Europe and the Pacific. Methods of incorporating these influences range from the use of non-Western European musical scale systems on traditional European instruments, to writing new music for non-European instruments from non-European or Maori cultures (for example Chinese traditional instruments and Indonesian Gamelan) and, more recently, combining instruments from two different cultures within the same ensemble. This presentation explores the challenges in composing for an ensemble that includes instruments with different tuning systems, playing methods, and melodic and harmonic frameworks. In addition the presentation describes how composers have collaborated with performance practitioners in order to respect the differing historical, cultural and spiritual significance of these instruments.

Musical examples:

* Inner Phases* Michael Norris (String Quartet, Chinese Ensemble)
* Toi Huarewa/Suspended Way* Victoria Kelly (Piano Trio, Taonga Pūoro)
* Kembang Suling* (Flute/Marimba), *From the Depths Sound the Great Sea Gongs* (symphony orchestra) Gareth Farr
* Hineputehue* Gillian Whitehead (String Quartet, Taonga Pūoro)
* Melodies for Orchestra, Three Transcriptions for String Quartet* Jack Body
* Pounamu* Helen Fisher (SATB Choir, Kouauau, Flute or Shakuhachi)