

*Grassroots, Rock(s), and Reggae: Music and
Mayhem at the Port Moresby Show*

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The 1996 Port Moresby Show in Papua New Guinea is an example of a cultural show that was a meta-experience, in Victor Turner's sense of culturally stimulated action that "distills all other kinds of experience" (1982, 19). In this case study, the focus is on one facet of its many activities: musical performances that were intermittently a mixture of popular music and mayhem. *Popular music* is used here in the sense of contemporary music that combines both indigenous and nonindigenous musical and poetic forms, and conventions of presentation.¹ *Mayhem* is used here in the sense of large-scale, spontaneous, and unpredictable social actions in which incidents of violence can occur.

The aim of this analysis is neither to present Papua New Guinea as an inherently or extraordinarily violent nation-state, nor to focus on the nature of violence in Papua New Guinea, which has been dealt with elsewhere in specific contexts (Gordon and Meggitt 1985; Toft 1985; Meggitt 1977). I also do not want to suggest that the violence itself was in anyway exotic. Rather, its specific form is what is of interest. In general terms, then, the aim of this analysis is to explore the use and function of music at a contemporary cultural show, informed by the perspectives of musicians on the violence that occurred, and by the nature of the public discourse about the moral panic that ensued. Although intermittent incidents of violence did occur during the popular music performances, the many other simultaneous activities elsewhere at the Port Moresby Show were nonviolent.

Alan Merriam distinguished use from function: "'Use' . . . refers to the situation in which music is employed in human action; 'function' con-

cerns the reasons for its employment and particularly the broader purpose that it serves" (1964, 21). The distinction is important because popular music had different uses and functions for the different cultural producers involved in the event (musicians, organizers, police, sponsors, recording companies, and members of the audience).

A vital aspect of popular culture and popular music in Papua New Guinea is public performance at cultural shows.² Along with religion and media, such performances have had a pivotal impact on the evolution of Papua New Guinea popular music (Niles 1994). In the form of regular festival programs and special-event concerts, cultural shows provide opportunities for musicians to hone musical and presentational skills, market themselves and their recordings, and reach large and diverse audiences. Beyond these aesthetic, industrial, and occupational concerns, they also are conspicuous celebrations of society (Manning 1983).³ A sense of *comunitas* is created via the interplay of performance and symbolic representations (Turner 1985, 1982). As well, the carnivalesque, liminal aspects of cultural shows make them potential sites for sociocultural and political contestation (Bakhtin 1984).

Cultural shows featuring popular music are significant sites of social construction, cultural production, and political negotiation in Papua New Guinea.⁴ They are a relatively recent social phenomenon and such large-scale, heterogeneous gatherings did not commonly occur in traditional contexts. Consequently, the protocols of interaction between participants are still evolving. Cultural shows are public forums in which micro-ethnic relationships are worked out in the context of macro issues such as national identity and cultural politics.

Jane Moulin has suggested that, in the context of the Pacific region, such celebrations of society featuring music (and dance) will be increasingly important (1996, 148), mitigating the transnational impact of economics by providing opportunities for the local and regional articulation of society, culture, and politics.⁵ Cultural shows help fashion "new" musical traditions, "new" ways of integrating the past and the present, and "new" mixtures of artistic expression and commercial enterprise (Kaepler 1988). Cultural shows also help fashion a viable sociocultural, political, and economic future in a region beset by the past impact of colonialism and the present effects of migration, tourism, and globalization.⁶

These interwoven processes are played out in Papua New Guinea in cultural shows such as the Port Moresby Show, where one important

function of music is to provide a chance to display publicly a range of emotional expressions. As Merriam has noted in similar contexts, these can include “the release of otherwise unexpressible thoughts and ideas, the correlation of a wide variety of emotions and music, the opportunity to ‘let off steam’ and perhaps to resolve social conflicts, the explosion of creativity itself, and the group expression of hostilities” (1964, 223). Such emotive (and not necessarily violent) expressions are found throughout the Pacific region at other large-scale events such as sporting matches and political rallies. Within these types of generalized emotive responses the performative particulars of artistic expression are played out, in this case mediated through music.

SETTING THE SCENE, PART I: THE EVENT’S ORGANIZATION

The forty-fourth annual Port Moresby Show took place on 8, 9, and 10 June 1996 at the Moitaka Showground in the National Capital District. It was organized by The Port Moresby Show Society, the official arm of the Papuan Agricultural, Industrial and Cultural Society Limited. The “Living Happily” cultural show was its official designation, and it took place during the Papua New Guinea national Year of Law Enforcement. Attendance over the three days was estimated at a hundred thousand people of mixed ages and genders (Nicholas 1996, 1). Numerous performances and activities took place concurrently. Along with music, these included sports, agriculture, rodeo, skydiving, equestrian events, and arts and crafts. Over forty *singsing* groups from across Papua New Guinea performed. Vendors sold food and drinks, and stalls offered assorted manufactured goods such as film, clothing, and recordings. Along with merchants, stallholders included community service and church groups.

In the president’s report, Harry Lewis noted the overall social and cultural importance of the event (*PMSP* 1996, 2). As well, he noted its particular importance in providing both performance and fund-raising opportunities for Papua New Guinean athletes going to the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games and for artists going to the seventh South Pacific Festival of Arts in Apia, Western Samoa. However, he declared that the level of sponsorship was disappointing: “I should like to emphasise the difficulties which the [Port Moresby] Show has encountered. With the damage and threats to life & property which have occurred at the grounds, these problems do not help anyone and in fact make it difficult to provide facil-

ities" (*PMS* 1996, 2). He specifically thanked the two major sponsors, Rothmans and Coca-Cola.

The popular music component of the Port Moresby Show took place in the Coca-Cola Amphitheatre.⁷ It is a "natural" sloping amphitheater with no fixed seating, sparse grass, and an overall capacity of several thousand people. The amphitheater's stage area includes a large main stage and backstage facilities. Mesh netting that can deflect large but not small objects was strung along the front from top to bottom. A wire security fence provided a further buffer zone between the stage and the audience. For the 1996 Port Moresby Show, sound mixing was done with "the biggest sound system in PNG" (*PMS* 1996, 14). Advertisements for the major commercial sponsors were prominently displayed both on and off stage.

SETTING THE SCENE, PART 2: THE NATURE OF THE MAYHEM

It is difficult to convey in words the sights, sounds, and smells of the mayhem that occurred intermittently at the Port Moresby Show. Perched on the second floor of the sound-mixing building at the back of the open-air amphitheater, I could look out and watch incidents unfold. Prolonged periods of "normal" interaction between the musical acts and the audience, and among audience members themselves, would be suddenly interrupted by incidents. Some were minor and impersonal, more comical than dangerous. For example, someone would blow up a condom, send it aloft like a balloon, and then people would try to knock it down with whatever was handy. Other incidents, however, were major, personal, and violent. These included people fighting each other with fists and sticks and throwing rocks at musicians on stage. Rocks also were sometimes thrown at young women dancing in the audience, who seemed to be breaking a social taboo by drawing public attention to themselves in the public sphere, even though men could do so with impunity. Altercations between the police (and security staff) and members of the audience occurred too.

When mayhem erupted, the audience would run helter-skelter away from the disturbance. Where minutes before an area had been packed tight, suddenly it was empty except for the swirling dust, bits of grass, and the scattered debris left behind in the wake of the almost-instantaneous exodus. Then within a few more minutes the area would once again be full, people often led back by one or two individuals (sometimes

still dancing) who would reclaim the abandoned space. Amid all this tumult, the music usually continued, providing a relentless rhythmic pulse to the coming and going of an audience who could disperse suddenly as if poisonous snakes had been dropped among them.

A few times I could see police and security staff in pursuit of people. In one incident, three police swinging truncheons gave chase to a drunken, violent man, triggering a stampede of people desperate to escape both the drunkard and the truncheons. He fled the amphitheater fully clothed, only to reappear minutes later stripped down to his underwear. He dashed across a deserted area with the police still in pursuit, disappearing into a crowd of people along the fringes. He vanished quickly from sight as people began to punch and kick him to the ground. He finally reemerged, unconscious, carried aloft by a group of people who spirited him out of the amphitheater. The police were unable to follow him in the general confusion. Several times during these kinds of incidents, the windows of the sound-mixing building had to be closed when rocks were thrown at it. The rocks, some quite large, threatened not only the sound equipment but also those inside—visitors, sound engineers, and members of their families.

Although the music usually continued while the incidents ran their course, sometimes it was too dangerous. The following excerpts from stage announcements give an indication of the nature of the violence directed at the musicians and how the announcer tried to calm the audience so the music could continue. Immediately after an act was forced to leave the stage because of rock throwing, the announcer told the audience (in English), “Try to sit down, huh? The bad ones here [at the Port Moresby Show] give a lot of fear to the innocent ones out there [in the audience]. And you give a lot of fear to the musicians performing up here [on stage]. The message is very clear. Ladies and gentlemen, if this behavior continues . . . [the musicians] refuse to continue. Could we see a lot more policemen in uniform out here amongst the crowd, please?” When some level of calm returned he said, “We will continue for you good people out here, but please once again we appeal to you. All the bands and the artists here are making a big appeal: it’s ok when you’re dancing but try not to throw objects, huh?” The announcement was especially poignant because the next act had a singer who was blind and would be unable to see the incoming rocks to avoid them.

Such incidents were intermittent. But as each day progressed tensions rose as people sweltered in the heat and dust for hours, with some using

drugs illegally brought into the Moitaka Showgrounds, and others dancing and singing along to the almost nonstop music. A celebration of society was occurring, but how it would unfold was unpredictable, especially for the musicians.

MUSICIANS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE MAYHEM

Cultural shows are sites where culture is constructed by both negotiation *and* contention (Linnekin 1992). At the 1996 Port Moresby Show, there was tacit negotiation that the acts would perform to the best of their abilities and the audience would respond appropriately. However, contention developed when either side was seen (or heard) to be not keeping their part of the bargain, for whatever personal, aesthetic, or political reasons. For musicians, it was difficult to perform when the mayhem threatened either to endanger them or to overwhelm the music. For some, the rock throwing, fights, and unrest in the audience were predictable and even somewhat understandable, although still worrisome. For others, it was a rude introduction to public performance under trying circumstances.

The following extracts from ethnographic interviews with musicians recount some of their observations about the Port Moresby Show and the roles of popular music in it. The informants were Wamsi Ilau, from Central Province, a studio musician and drummer with the Chin-H-Meen Super Sounds backing band; Lily Blake, from East New Britain Province, a recording artist with Chin-H-Meen; and Denis Crowdy, from the National Capital District, an Australian lecturer in music in the Faculty of Creative Arts at the University of Papua New Guinea (Port Moresby).

These particular informants (taken from a larger sample) are broadly representative in that they provided music-based insights on the contexts informing why mayhem erupts, how musicians respond, and where music fits in the sociocultural and political equation. The perspectives of the other participants (organizers, police, members of the audience) are also important, but the focus of this analysis is on musicians because they possess unique insider information on the cultural production of Papua New Guinean music and performance. By occupation (and perhaps inclination) they are skilled observers of the roles of artistic expression in both popular music and celebrations of society. More than anyone else, they are the ones who initiate and try to control the trajectory of performance. That task was fraught with both musical and personal challenges when the per-

formance of popular music at the Port Moresby Show became literally a rock concert.

Wamsi Ilau considered cultural shows to be musically challenging, “because there’s different artists who come up [on stage] with different styles of music, different arrangements . . . from string bands to contemporary westernized music, all mixed up with our *tumbuna*, our traditional style of music.” Wamsi observed that at the Port Moresby Show, “Most people come out from the urban areas and out of the country [and] they’ve never seen [live] music that’s been played like that before. And they get excited, just getting up dancing. The rocks and sticks that start flying towards the stage [sometimes happen] when people at the back [of the audience] are sitting back relaxing and wanting to see their favorite artists. And . . . the young fellows in front get up and sing and dance and distract them from watching what’s happening on the stage.” Unfortunately, rocks aimed at people dancing in front of the stage sometimes overshoot and hit the musicians on stage.

Having performed all over Papua New Guinea and at numerous Port Moresby Shows, Wamsi stated that violence at cultural shows happens repeatedly in Port Moresby. “The Port Moresby Show amphitheater is known for that. [But] around Lae, Goroka, Mt Hagen, Rabaul, and Bougainville the people are good and very very responding and excited to see their favorite stars and it’s just as [a] normal [performance].” According to Wamsi, changes in the styles of music performed at cultural shows are having an impact. “Now, because of the style of music that Papua New Guinean musicians are coming up with, this Caribbean mix, [getting] into reggae and with a bit of disco and rap in there, that is what the young people are getting addicted to and getting over-excited about.”

Wamsi was quite philosophical about mayhem because in the context of Papua New Guinean audiences he feels that sometimes it’s “nothing to do with the musicians. Like sometimes when a crowd gets rowdy we just stop . . . and the singer says ‘are you here to listen to good music or do you want to start throwing rocks?’ And [then, usually] the crowd sits back [down] and the whole music starts again right from the middle. . . . But then they start getting excited and dance again.” Outbreaks of rock throwing and fights in the audience require the rhythm section to concentrate on the audience’s response to the music. As the drummer, what Wamsi does is “[keep] looking at the audience. [When they start] standing up and start dancing, [I] start off quickly with the drums and get the bass

guitarist to start off also just to try to control them. And then [when] the singers come out, that's when everything can start to [get out of control]. When people get crazy, they just want the music to go on and on. They don't want the music to stop or pause."

Wamsi said he considers himself lucky when mayhem erupts, because as the drummer, "I'm right at the back [of the] stage, on an even higher stage! I feel sorry for the other guys who are playing guitar up front They all rely on us [in the rhythm section] that the rhythm doesn't slow down or change because the people are already on their feet and if we shorten the whole music they get very upset." For him, as a musician, the mayhem can be as exciting and unpredictable as it is for the audience, as long as the situation is not totally out of control. "We [musicians] get the extra energy from the crowds when they start screaming and chanting away, singing along with the singer and dancing. It really gives us that extra encouragement in our music." As a drummer on stage for many hours at the Port Moresby Show, Wamsi used his drums, amplified and insistent, to help set the tempo for a celebration of society the musicians could not always control.

While Wamsi Ilau was a veteran performer at the Port Moresby Show, Lily Blake was a novice. She is a new recording artist with Chin-H-Meen and said it was an exciting challenge to reproduce her recordings. "On stage it's more lively [because] in the studio we come in one by one [and do overdubs to sequenced tracks]. But with the live band . . . it's very good. It sort of makes you alive, like the music is in you [and] you put it all out into the audience." Lily suggested that although rock throwing is common at the Port Moresby Show, it is not always so at cultural shows elsewhere in Papua New Guinea. She noted that in her home town of Rabaul, "nothing ever happens like that. It's one of the best towns. [Audiences] go in and they sit very quietly and they listen to the music, the artists, and they clap and they shout and that's all. They don't throw things. This is my first time to see people throwing things."

Regardless of her intention to entertain the audience with her music, rocks were thrown at her. Lily admitted she was "scared of them. It was lucky that we had the net there. But little ones were coming in So the boss [Raymond Chin] said 'Stop the music and go off stage.' Then the next day . . . I was put on earlier, about ten o'clock [in the morning], and it was alright. There was heaps of crowd and no fights, no rocks." An important part of performance was to be convincing. "You have to really

express yourself and show that you're really singing the songs which you have composed and your singing is coming straight from inside you and not just from somewhere else." She also was a bit apprehensive. "At first when other groups went up on stage I felt a bit scared because I was the only female among all these male musicians. And I felt that if I went up [on stage] I might get all sorts of [negative] words and things coming up from the crowd."

For Lily, being one of the few solo female performers was significant, and drawing public attention to herself was arguably a reason why she got a negative reaction from some in the audience. "When a female gets up there [on stage] they just go crazy. . . . And I didn't just stand with the microphone and sing. I was moving. I was dancing to my music." She also felt that audiences "should be appreciating a woman [the same] as with male artists. Papua New Guinea has all these male artists and not enough females, which is not good enough. They're just putting down the women. We should be up there too." However, Lily recognized that there are deep-seated cultural reasons why a female performer has to fight for respect and recognition. "If you grow up back in the village where it's different, you would be following the custom and tradition and you'll think wrongly all the time [about women performing]."

Lily devised a strategy to deal with negative reactions. "I thought to myself that if they did say something [negative] or throw things . . . then I would just say something back and make them happy. You know, talk first and make them happy so they'll appreciate me and then they'll also appreciate my music. So that's what I did. Before singing my songs I dedicated them to some of my friends and said some things and appreciated the crowd." However, even dedicating songs in the volatile atmosphere had unforeseen consequences. "On Saturday some people were drunk, and they were acting stupid. [Friends of mine] said that the crowds had a fight because I dedicated songs to some people and I didn't dedicate songs to other people." As a new singer and novice entertainer Lily admitted she "felt really good and really scared at the same time," but overall the Port Moresby Show was a valuable, although sometimes intimidating, experience.

While Wamsi's and Lily's comments arose out of performance, Denis Crowdy's comments arose out of a teaching and research interest in Papua New Guinean popular music and attendance at different Papua New Guinean cultural shows, including the Port Moresby Show. Denis

combined his own reflections with those of his music students in the following observations. As to whether or not musicians think rock throwing and fights are 'normal,' Denis observed, "Whether [it is normal] is not something I can directly answer, only to say that people [in Port Moresby] are pretty tolerant of violent and disruptive behavior from men (I can't think of any real examples involving women), especially when drunk. [And] when a reaction occurs it tends to be violent itself." On what constitutes normality, he suggested, "'Normal' is a difficult concept in relation to urban PNG. . . . People accept violence and behavior in general that is not normal to people in village contexts, or to non-Papua New Guineans."

Denis suggested that rock throwing is not common elsewhere in Papua New Guinea and that the layout, location, and condition of the Moitaka Showground and the Coca-Cola Amphitheatre may be part of the problem at the Port Moresby Show. "I have not seen rocks thrown at [cultural] shows in Goroka [and elsewhere]. One thing I have often thought is that the performance area [at the Port Moresby Show] is pretty awful really. Dry, dusty, [and] the band [on stage] is sort of below people. It's crowded, there are only a couple of entrances and exits, and it takes place in the middle of the day. Alcohol is handy due to the proximity of Port Moresby and bottle shops out that way. It all kind of adds up, I guess. I therefore think that it is a particularly urban thing."⁸

Factors such as the popularity and self-assurance of individual singers and groups also are significant. Denis believed that "Already popular musicians ooze a certain confidence and seem to handle the crowd well. Others don't, so I guess it must impact on their confidence as performers in that kind of situation." Another consideration he noted is the kind of music being played, because the style and the language used can be connected to regional identities and animosities. "The styles being played do matter. This is perhaps related to . . . regional likes and dislikes." Change in performance and music over the years is an area of his own research, and he suggested that "the 'webs of identities' that are constructed through popular music today tend to be more urban than village, though they still retain important regional affiliations and features, both in terms of style and popularity (ie, fans)."

Denis provided a cogent example of a musician's personal reaction that encapsulated several of his observations. "One of my ex-students, who played in the 1994 Port Moresby Show, was distraught . . . because he had

rocks thrown at him. The band was playing in the ‘PNG Contemporary’ style (the ‘Sanguma’ style) that has developed here and [he] could sort of understand the reaction, but was by no means happy about it. [It] ended up creating a pretty intense fight amongst band members.”

BACKGROUND ON THE MUSIC AT THE PORT MORESBY SHOW

Although at times the music itself seemed somewhat superfluous to the dynamics of the musical performances, it is worth noting the kinds of music that provided the soundtrack for what was an intermittently violent celebration of society. There is a sizable research corpus on the music, musicians, and musical practice of Papua New Guinea’s numerous and diverse cultures and societies. Historically, researchers often focused on “traditional” musics. Current researchers, however, also focus on “contemporary,” syncretic musics arising out of contact between Papua New Guinea’s Melanesian, Polynesian, European, and Asian cultures. Along with Michael Webb’s pioneering work on the relationships between contemporary music, language use, and notions of identity (1997, 1993a), and Don Niles’s numerous publications and archival studies on behalf of the National Research Institute (1992), recent research has explored numerous facets of Papua New Guinean popular music. These include the development of the recording industry (Philpott 1995), the production and use of music video and music documentary (Hayward 1995, 1993; Wild 1995), and the nature of collaboration between indigenous and nonindigenous musicians (Hayward 1997a, 1997b; Hutton 1993; Webb 1993b). Especially noteworthy is the work of indigenous researchers such as Clement Gima, Nixon Kemoi, Soru Anthony Subam, Gregory Topurua, Julie ToLiman Turalir, and Pius Wasi, who are actively involved in the Papua New Guinean popular music scene variously as researchers, artists, and teachers (Reigle 1995; Niles 1996).

The popular music performed at the Port Moresby Show can be characterized as syncretic in Margaret Kartomi’s sense of a “musical synthesis”; that is, “the working out of contradictory elements between two or more impinging musics through a dialectic process into a new musical whole” (1981, 234).⁹ It combined distinct western and indigenous components (eg, bamboo flutes and *garamut* and *kundu* drums) to construct something uniquely Papua New Guinean.¹⁰ The popular music styles most in evidence at the Port Moresby Show are broadly classifiable as “grass-

roots,” “rock,” and “reggae.” The terms are somewhat problematic, however, because similar or related terms are used and interpreted differently in different parts of the world.

Webb provided a pertinent, if somewhat tangential, definition of *grassroots* in his analysis of the use of an acoustic guitar in the advertising logo of Pacific Gold Sound. He identified grassroots as being “local, rural, village-based, since an electric guitar would be more likely to be indexical of urban power bands and popular music from overseas” (Webb 1993a, 198).¹¹ In the case of the Port Moresby Show, however, some participants had a slightly different understanding of grassroots, which seemed to be as much about attitude as musical and performative particulars. When asked specifically what constituted grassroots, they held that the actual kind of instrumentation used (acoustic or electric) was secondary to the intent of the music, the popularity of the act, or the level of positive reaction it received and by whom. That is, if an electric guitar helped address what the audience considered important (such as local or regional identity), it was as indexical of grassroots as an acoustic guitar.

A pivotal point in trying to define grassroots music at the Port Moresby Show is the importance of perceptions of relevance and integrity regarding the audience’s lived experience and notions of identity. In that sense, for at least some people at the 1996 Port Moresby Show, the term spoke to both the rural experience noted by Webb (1993a) and the urban experience of many in the audience. In Jamaica-based and diasporic reggae forms (where the instrumentation is primarily electrified), “roots” music has somewhat similar connotations. Technology is not so much the issue as subjective perceptions of sociocultural, political, and musical relevance and integrity, however articulated or understood.

Rock is another term that is open to a range of interpretations. Since its inception as rock ’n’ roll, it has continually mutated and has long ceased to refer solely to music and music practices arising out of a mid-twentieth century blend of Afro-American and Anglo-American forms. It has come to mean many things, including the use of certain instrumentation, dramaturgical “attitudes” and gestures, sound-shaping technologies, and conventions of presentation. At the Port Moresby Show, the music contained elements of a western rock aesthetic, although “rock bands” as such are not common in Papua New Guinea. The main instrumentation (drum kit, percussion, electric and acoustic guitars, bass, keyboards, and occasional brass, reeds, or woodwinds), the stage actions of the musicians, the orga-

nization of songs and sets, and the shaping of the overall sound, were all firmly grounded in western notions of rock music, especially as mediated outside the Anglo-American axis via MTV. Some Papua New Guinean acts were more rock oriented than others, but aside from language use and specific repertoire a western rock band could have stepped on stage at the 1996 Port Moresby Show and performed immediately without any sense of presentational or technological dislocation. The same situation would apply to announcers, sound engineers, and other technical staff.

Something that was noteworthy, and at times off-putting, was the absence of other popular styles such as string-band music and an overwhelming emphasis on one particular style of Papua New Guinean popular music, “*ailan* reggae.” Liner notes for a compilation album produced by Pacific Gold Sound (nd) state, “Ailan reggae music originates from the islands region of PNG. The Rabaul musicians have adapted the Jamaican reggae style in a faster and more danceable beat.” Traces of reggae’s Afro-Caribbean and European heritage are present in *ailan* reggae. However, as elsewhere in the Pacific region, indigenization, industrialization, and internationalization have seen reggae evolve into a myriad of local and regional hybrids, such as Hawai’i’s Jawaiian (Lewis 1992; Weintraub 1993), New Caledonia’s *kaneka* (Goldsworthy 1997), and New Zealand’s Maori “Pacific reggae” (Mitchell 1996, 1994).¹² Papua New Guinean *ailan* reggae features an insistent offbeat emphasis on electric guitar, with reggae inflections in the rhythm section. Its elevated tempos make it danceable but also emphasize its hybridity and predictability. Many songs and acts at the Port Moresby Show sounded similar and, aside from language use, were almost indistinguishable from each other. This outcome was predictable from the industrialized nature of the music’s cultural production, which is addressed later.

Regardless of its repetitiveness, or perhaps because of it, music was central to the ambience of the cultural show and by extension the formation of notions of identity for the musicians and the audience. Simon Frith has suggested that because music is dynamic and intense, it is central to contemporary identity. As such, “it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective” (Frith 1996, 110). Jacques Attali suggested that music is also prophetic, able to “make audible the new world that will gradually become visible, that will impose itself and regulate the order of things” (1985, 11). Based on a context somewhat comparable to Papua New Guinea (New Caledonia and

kaneka music), David Goldsworthy proposed that “music often has an active role to play in . . . identity construction/reconstruction, and is not simply reflective of general cultural tendencies. Music can, in fact, *directly* activate cultural innovation, changes in identity, and political processes” (1997, 27). In Papua New Guinea (and elsewhere in the Pacific region) music remains central to the identity formation (as creators, consumers, and citizens) that underlies and drives celebrations of society such as the Port Moresby Show.

THE MUSIC INDUSTRY CONTEXT

Cultural shows such as the Port Moresby Show provide a concentration of artistic expression and commercial enterprise in one place and at one time. They provide an opportunity for audiences to experience many musical acts, and for the acts to reach more people in a few days than would otherwise be possible. For musicians, this is occupationally important because Papua New Guinea has a very rugged landscape, a still-developing transportation infrastructure, and a widely dispersed population. Costs of touring are prohibitive. Therefore, cultural shows provide opportunities that can benefit, to varying degrees, all the cultural producers involved in Papua New Guinean popular music.

The confluence of acts, audiences, and music at the 1996 Port Moresby Show, and previous shows, was influenced by the specific organization and practices of the Papua New Guinean recording industry. It is important to note these here briefly, because not only did they have an impact on the music at the Port Moresby Show, but they also have had a more general impact on the aesthetics, evolution, and ethos of Papua New Guinean popular music. The overall industry operates within several significant parameters that have been remarked on by various researchers (Hayward 1997a; Niles 1996; Philpott 1995; Webb 1995a). These include the relatively small size of the domestic market, the flourishing trade in pirated overseas recordings, the general poverty and rural isolation of many of its consumers, and ongoing controversies concerning issues of musical and cultural copyright and artists' royalty rates.

The music industry in Papua New Guinea is profoundly influenced by its two major recording, manufacturing, and marketing companies, Chin-H-Meen and Pacific Gold Sound. Most successful musicians in Papua New Guinea are associated with either one company or the other (although

occasionally they switch). At the 1996 Port Moresby Show, most of the acts, sound engineers, and backing band musicians were connected to Chin-H-Meen.¹³ The Chin-H-Meen Supersounds Bands I and II provided accompaniment for solo artists and comprised seasoned studio musicians (such as Wamsi Ilau), who may have played on, produced, or engineered the original recordings being recreated live on stage.

The major exception to Chin-H-Meen's dominance was Hot Hot Hot, an Anglo-Australian act named after the hit Caribbean *soca* song by Arrow. They were affiliated with Pacific Gold Sound. Hot Hot Hot featured three female singers and dancers and their male keyboard player and music director. They performed to sequenced backing tracks, with additional instrumentation and performances by Papua New Guinean musicians. Hot Hot Hot had been brought to Papua New Guinea under the sponsorship of Coca-Cola, and for six weeks had taken their "half-hour pop music and anti-drug show" to seventy-five schools in Port Moresby, Lae, Mt Hagen, and Goroka (Setepano 1996, 3). However, because they were affiliated with Pacific Gold they had to use their own sound engineer and stage set-up at the Port Moresby Show, which interrupted an otherwise tightly organized program.

Hot Hot Hot's performance itself was probably an unintentional parody of western pop-music clichés from the last several decades. Every style from disco to pop to the Cotton-Eyed Joe was performed, albeit in a pedestrian manner. The show had obviously been designed for hotel showrooms and cabarets, but the Port Moresby Show audience was remarkably polite and generally receptive, although during one performance rocks were thrown (Tami 1996, 21). Hot Hot Hot's mediocrity was exotic (and surreal) in its own way in the context of a Papua New Guinean cultural show: their first song was literally an extended version of a Coca-Cola commercial. However, the political economy of the Papua New Guinean recording and music industries is such that Hot Hot Hot received headliner status as an "international" act, even though inferior to many of the national acts.

THE DISCOURSE ABOUT MORAL PANIC AT THE 1996 PORT MORESBY SHOW

A final aspect of the Port Moresby Show that deserves mention is how music and musicians were positioned within the discourse that arose con-

cerning issues of law and order, the breakdown of which was supposedly exhibited in the mayhem. Underlying tensions inform large-scale events of any kind in Port Moresby. One is the micro-ethnic tension found in an urban environment where hereditary enemies or culturally different and economically competing groups of people are forced to live together, often in dire poverty. Another tension is the addition of alcohol and other drugs to an already volatile mixture of people crowded together in the heat and dust under the ever-watchful eyes of police and security staff. Although musical matters (such as the acts themselves, the styles of music, the songs chosen) are important, at a superficial level they also can be used as rationalizations for the expression of deep-seated animosities and equally deep-seated loyalties.

Whereas music, and musicians as an occupational group, has often been implicated in moral panics, such as the connection of jazz, rock 'n' roll, and rap music and musicians with violence, social disorder, and immorality (Gray 1989), the situation with the 1996 Port Moresby Show was different. It seemed as if the real culprit being constructed by the media was the audience, an amorphous mass demonized as seemingly incapable of acting properly, appreciating good music, or becoming modern, rational, and national citizens of Papua New Guinea. Rather than being objects of scorn, the music and musicians were somewhat irrelevant, incidental (and accidental) to the playing out of pressing but not necessarily obvious underlying processes such as urbanization, nationalization, and globalization.

John Waiko observed that issues of law and order and violence are commented on regularly by Papua New Guinean creative artists (1993, 217). They also were a focus of media attention before, during, and after the Port Moresby Show, in various forms. Some were statements of the positive purpose of the cultural show and how that should be respected; some were warnings to audiences that violence would not be tolerated by authorities. There was a fine line between telling potential visitors that they would be safe while at the same time acknowledging that maintaining law and order had been a problem in the past. Some examples from print media demonstrate the general mood of the discourse on moral panic and its primary participants.

The *Independent* quoted the Port Moresby Show Society President Harry Lewis as saying (somewhat ominously), "a strong police and security presence would be available inside and outside the gates to make sure

the showgoers enjoy the show” (Kamus 1996, 27). A large ad in the *Independent* advised that along with banning the sale of betel nut and ice blocks outside, there would be “No Weapons Allowed in Show Grounds” (1996, 33). In the Port Moresby Show’s own program, an entry by the National Capital District Commission, “Why Bother with Gardens?” noted that along with reasons such as firewood, fruit, and fresh air, “There are social reasons too [for gardens]. Anti-social or rascal behaviour is worse in hot, dusty, shadeless, flowerless places where children have no trees in which to climb and where people are not proud of their neighbourhoods” (Port Moresby Show Programme 1996, 21).

A front-page story in the *Post-Courier* asserted (somewhat incongruously given the incidents listed) that “the show was generally quiet over the three days.” However, in the same article it stated, “The rock concert closed early yesterday because of rowdy crowd behaviour which erupted into a clash with police. [Show Ground Police Commander Chief Inspector Paul Ari] is expected to ask for the concert to be held earlier in the day” (*Post-Courier*, 11 June 1996). On the same front page of the *Post-Courier*, the caption under a picture of Saugas lead singer Alan Heravo performing read, “Heravo works up rapport with the crowd, but the wire fence [shown in the picture] comes in handy later as rock-throwing broke out between some spectators and police,” almost as if the musicians were not only victims of the violence themselves but also innocent or incapable of causing or encouraging it.¹⁴

Mayhem in the audience in the form of rock throwing and spontaneous fights was identified by some media, organizers, and musicians as having a negative impact on the music. For example, a front-page headline in the *National* read, “Unruly Fans Drive Away Rock Artists” (24 June 1996). The accompanying article noted the opinion of Chin-H-Meen’s managing director, Raymond Chin, that “most of the time the trouble is caused by a small minority who are probably drunk or high on drugs.” Chin’s suggestion was that “next year, what we’ll do is put Gospel bands for the last day concert. . . . We’ll just play the Gospel bands all afternoon, and that should cool everybody off” (Tami 1996, 21).

Informing the discourse about moral panic was the unstated notion that if music is important to identity and also prophetic (as suggested by Frith [1996] and Attali [1985] respectively), the mayhem was a cause for concern because of what it suggested about a general breakdown of law and order. However, if the media (print especially) resorted to demonizing

the music and musicians (as is common elsewhere), it could cause conflict with the major recording companies. After all, they are influential because they are important advertisers, sponsors of television and radio programs, and affiliates of major overseas multinational corporations such as Coca-Cola and Pepsi. Consequently, the audience had to be demonized. As an object of scorn and a medium of moral panic, its heterogeneous composition had the very real benefit of rendering it not only impersonal but also tribally and regionally unspecific. It was not the music or musicians that drove the audience to violence, but some other (unnamed and perhaps unfamiliar) devil, implicitly connected to illegal drug use, disrespect, and sociocultural, and by extension political, disunity.

CONCLUSION AND REPRISÉ

The 1996 Port Moresby Show was a site of social construction, cultural production, and political negotiation where questions such as What is the role of popular music and musicians in cultural shows? How can the music industry help forge Papua New Guinean identity and still make money? and What is an acceptable level of violence? were answered, at least temporarily, amid the mayhem that intermittently accompanied and sometimes interrupted the music.

Rather than only emphasizing the violence that occurred, however, I have also noted the important roles of music, musicians, and the music industry in cultural shows and celebrations of society. Several interwoven linguistic, sociocultural, and musical *lingua francas* were at work simultaneously: grassroots' relevance and authenticity, rock's instrumentation and attitude, and reggae's rhythms and intensity. In the context of a cultural show such as the 1996 Port Moresby Show, Papua New Guinean popular music is a mercurial mixture of artistic expression and commercial enterprise. It helps provide common forms and conventions of presentation (often imported, although routinely indigenized and industrialized) in order to express musical difference and diversity while simultaneously contributing, somewhat paradoxically and unpredictably, to a national musical culture and thus a musically mediated, nationally imagined community of consumers and citizens.

Musicians' reactions to the mayhem vary because they each have different perspectives on the parts they play in the phenomenon, and the uses and functions of popular music. Some of their observations were

especially insightful. Wamsi Ilau's concern for his fellow musicians was balanced by his long experience in such performance situations. He had a quite forgiving view of why mayhem erupts: "I think that there's no problem with the audience, with rock throwing and all that, because [it's] *our* music that *we* play to the people. That's what makes them feel so excited that they just overdo things."

Lily Blake had no intention of being deterred by her introduction to the hazards of public performance. She observed, "Papua New Guinea has lots of cultures and [some people] they think that a woman shouldn't be around [places] like this with men . . . but then I grew up differently. Whatever they say I just put it to the back and I go ahead with what I think [is right]. I'm doing this right, you know."

Denis Crowdy took a wider perspective as an outside observer not directly involved with the performances and contended, "I don't think [the mayhem] is a Melanesian thing at all . . . [I've had] too many experiences of polite, accepting, enthusiastic and welcoming audiences in other situations. I feel it is mostly a Port Moresby thing, or perhaps a large urban thing, [and not] a pan-PNG or Melanesian thing. You could probably find other parallels in terms of violence in general in the cities." Denis's music students, who come from all over Papua New Guinea, suggested more prosaically that "people throw rocks for the very simple reason that they might not be listening to the band they want to hear! Regional considerations [are part of] this explanation. For example, Sepik fans of a Sepik band (such as the Sagothorns) might not be all that impressed at hearing the music of a gospel band from Central [Province], or a band that they consider to be second rate."

The informants provided varied perspectives on the connections between music and mayhem at the 1996 Port Moresby Show. What underlies them all, however, is an intuitive and instructive appreciation of the negotiated and contentious nature of performance, the dominant influence of a few companies in the Papua New Guinea music industry, the political machinations informing the discourse on moral panic, and the multifaceted uses and functions of music and musicians in cultural shows and celebrations of society in Papua New Guinea.

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Notes

1 Amy Stillman (1993) identified five general phases or aspects of indigenization: survival and resurgence, coexistence, appropriation, emergence of syncretic forms, and absorption of traditional and syncretic forms within indigenous theoretical frameworks.

2 Popular culture is regarded as neither pure exploitation from “above” nor undiluted grassroots expression from “below,” but rather as a site of contradiction and mediation that is related to structures of power but not determined by them and hence relatively autonomous (Middleton 1990).

3 Four central features of the celebration of society identified by Frank Manning (1983, 4) are useful in appreciating the complexity of an event such as the Port Moresby Show: (1) performance, involving the dramatic presentation of cultural symbols; (2) entertainment, assuming enjoyment; (3) public, socializing the private; and (4) participatory, encompassing performers, producers, and audiences.

4 Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1979) described social construction as the conscious construction and reconstruction of social and cultural reality, while Pierre Bourdieu (1993) interpreted the “field” of cultural production as the organization of objective relations found within the division of labor of production, reproduction, and diffusion of symbolic goods. Abner Cohen (1979) noted the connection (not always conspicuous or coherent) between politics and large-scale public performance, especially in mobilizing cultural and communal relationships in power struggles.

5 Jane Moulin (1996, 138), drawing on trend analyst John Naisbitt (1994) on the impact of economic globalization, observed that “the more people are bound together economically, the more they want to be independent politically and culturally. In other words, the more people integrate, the more they feel a need to differentiate and to claim the freedom

to assert their own distinctiveness.” See Jocelyn Linnekin (1992) for a useful theoretical and political look at cultural construction in a Pacific context. She highlighted the shifting and contentious nature of academic involvement at the levels of theory and practice. Of special use here is her suggestion that there is discursive value in “non-scholarly voices,” such as the use of ethnographic data from cultural producers.

6 Alain Babadzan (1988) cautioned against a too-enthusiastic embrace of culture, as displayed and reified at festivals, as an innocent palliative to the impact of broader and determinant economic and political processes. He asserted that national elites in the Pacific region (often the least “traditional” sector of the society) have embraced particular cultural practices and artefacts, often lumped together under the rubric of *kastom*, in order to specifically enervate local or regional cultures and fashion a national one. He proposed that in this process of “cultural folklorization” (1988, 215), elites use festivals as a way of masking other more important agendas such as “development,” in which “culture itself has entered into the realm of commodities” (1988, 203). Steven Feld used the term “hegemonic folkloricisation” (1988, 96) to identify the process whereby touristic events, such as cultural shows in Papua New Guinea, may inadvertently institutionalize and thus stymie the evolution of musics and musical practice. See *Come Mek Me Hol’ Yu Han’* (1988) for several relevant articles on the interface between tourism, nationalism, festivals, and traditional musics in the Pacific region; and Margaret Jolly (1992) on the dynamics underlying the formation of notions of authenticity and inauthenticity.

7 An informative panel discussion on the Coca-Cola and Pepsi connection with Papua New Guinean popular music can be found in Reigle (1995, 214–219).

8 This view was echoed by Soru Anthony Subam, a music lecturer and influential musician, who felt that the rock throwing and violence are most pronounced and predictable in Port Moresby.

9 See Kartomi (1981) for a useful overview of the processes and results of such contact. Peter Dunbar-Hall noted, on the difficulty of analyzing syncretic music, that “each music brings with it its own set of connotations, which in a new context change and take on new meanings. Whether or not we can know the connotations of indigenous music in its traditional settings is a controversial matter, what such music may imply in new settings is equally open to interpretation” (1995, 94).

10 Webb (1993a, 3–4) identified three broad eras in his chronology of

music change in Papua New Guinea: precontact times (up to 1870s); early postcontact influence (pre-guitar) (1870–1945); and recent postcontact influence (post-guitar) (1945–mid-1980s). He also proposed four main classifications for contemporary Papua New Guinean text or music types: *singsing tumbuna*, *kwaia*, stringband, and power band song (1993a, 102–103). Pius Wasi (1995, 227) proposed another schema, using the classifications string band, popular, and contemporary.

11 Interestingly, the cassette cover for *PNG Ailan Reggae Hits Volume 2* features an electric guitar, palm trees, and a man with dreadlocks, along with the Pacific Gold Sound logo, which combines a palm tree and an acoustic guitar. See Webb (1993a, 195–233) for detailed analyses of cassette artwork (and the marketing of lingua franca popular song—Tok Pisin—in Papua New Guinea).

12 Specific Oceanic foci on this phenomenon are found in Mitchell (1996).

13 The Coca-Cola Amphitheatre program listed all acts. Some were soloists backed by the Supersounds Band I (including George Telek, Hitsy Golou, Ronnie Galama, Willie Tropu) or the Supersounds Band II (including Lily Blake, Robert Oeka, and Saugas); others were mostly self-contained bands (including Duaks Band, Jr Kopex, Kuakumba Rutz, and Kundu Reggae). The overwhelming majority of acts were male, as were the personnel of the Supersounds Bands I and II. Acts with women in a dominant role included Lily Blake and Hot Hot Hot.

14 Webb recounted a 1990 incident in which Tolai musicians from East New Britain had a not-so-innocent role in fanning an interethnic dispute with East Sepik audiences (1995b). The musically mediated dispute arose out of violence at a music performance at the East Sepik Provincial Show, and the band Shutdown's subsequent comments on it in a popular song ("*Wewak i Paia*," *Wewak Is Burning*). The song was perceived as an inaccurate slight by people in East Sepik. In another incident, Webb recalled that in mid-1993 "Chin-H-Meen mounted a big live concert in Tabari Place, Boroko [Port Moresby]. It featured their recording stars Telek, Leonard Kania, Kathy Lee and others. This was held on a Saturday morning during shopping hours (first mistake) on a constructed stage in front of the post office. Naturally a huge crowd turned up, and eventually mayhem erupted. Apparently a couple of guys were under the stage sexually assaulting a woman (all audience members) and the papers were full of the story. . . . [M]oral panic broke out linking music

with lawlessness. There were newspaper articles denouncing PNG pop and rock by significant public figures such as Sir Paulias Matane” (personal communication).

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Abstract

An important facet of popular music in Papua New Guinea is public performance at cultural shows, which provide opportunities for musicians to develop occupational skills, sell their recordings, and reach large and diverse audiences. Cultural shows are also opportunities for the celebration of society, and sites for sociocultural and political contestation. This article explores the 1996 Port Moresby Show in Papua New Guinea as an example of a cultural show that featured popular music but also intermittently included mayhem, violence that threatened at times to endanger musicians and members of the audience and overwhelm the music. The description and analysis provide a case study of the multifaceted uses and functions of music in cultural shows and celebrations of society in Papua New Guinea, the perspectives of musicians on the violence that occurred at the 1996 Port Moresby Show, and the nature of the public discourse about the moral panic that resulted.

KEYWORDS: moral panics, musicians, Papua New Guinea, performance arts, popular music, Port Moresby Show