

*The Value of Indigenous Music in the Life and Ministry of the Church: The United Church in the Duke of York Islands*, by Andrew Midian. Apwiti-ire: Studies in Papua New Guinea Musics 6. Boroko: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1999. ISBN 9980-68-034-2, 92 pages, figures, appendix, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. 10 kina, plus postage and bank charges.

This small book is timely and will be appreciated by those who champion the worth of vernacular music, particularly when it is facing extinction. Only in rare cases do we hear from one within such a culture who has the insight to realize that the deepest expression of a people is also in jeopardy. Andrew Midian who, while a student at Rarongo Theological College, began to weigh the value of indigenous music in the church at the time he was writing on the Duke of York Islands in order to meet the requirements of the Bachelor of Divinity degree, soon recognized that the subject was a vast one, not limited to the Duke of York Islands. Now an ordained minister, skilled in languages and music composition and performance, he continues to contemplate the implementation of indigenous music for Christian worship in an area whose inhabitants were evangelized over a century ago and were taught western hymns and harmonization. Midian is well aware of the problems in indigenizing church music.

For all the years that the church has been in existence in the Duke of York Islands, a large repertoire of traditional secular music has also been in existence, although “underground” for fear of disapproval. Some of this

repertoire is nonreligious expression of human emotion that would not be incompatible with Christian practice; but through the centuries it has been very difficult for well-meaning teachers of the west to know what is compatible with Christianity when they have not learned the language and customs of the people, and when very few have investigated local music, presuming it antithetic to Christianity. Only a westerner who knows the language and the intent of what is performed musically is equipped to make any assessment, although it seems far more in order that enlightened local men or women decide whether a musical item is congruent with Christianity. But what music will satisfy everyone? Some will want to remain with the western hymns and anthems they were taught; others will copy another style of worship—even though it too may be imported; and others will try to fuse the foreign and the vernacular, but, as Midian points out, the western elements will be dominant. Syncretism is another problem in that it promotes a dualism like the present one, which allocates western music for Christian purposes and indigenous music for secular and pre-Christian beliefs.

As in many parts of Papua New Guinea, a generation has been schooled away from home and, as a consequence, has missed out on the oral transmission of their own music; instead, they have adopted (once more) music from the west, only this time it is the style of pop stars and so they are again caught within a music system not their own.

However, all is not lost so long as there are thinkers and educators like Andrew Midian, who is challenged by

the huge responsibility of implementing indigenous music for Christian worship in order to reach and relay an understanding at the deepest level. Willingness on the part of worshippers to listen with vicarious pleasure to one another's music is well within the practice of Christianity, one must believe.

As the author points out, attempting to make foreign music comprehensible by merely translating the words does not make it indigenous; the music is still foreign, in concept and in meaning. Even if new words are applied to existing vernacular melodies, the task is not complete because melody itself has such strong associative meaning that the original intent may be transmitted, another form of syncretism. The author cites many examples of music's purpose in the Old Testament. There are very few such references in the New Testament, but each is a profound occasion (for which "the feet can be still").

There is a recurring mandate throughout the Bible that believers sing and that they sing a new song to the Lord. It may be of use to the author to know that the music system of the Duke of York Islands has been analyzed, and in that document (housed at the International Archive of Folk Cultures in The Library of Congress, Washington, DC) he will find his "anchor points" under the name of Emic Features, belonging uniquely to Duke of York music. It is time for gifted indigenous composers such as Andrew Midian to compose new songs for his people. We eagerly await the outcome.

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*Navigating Islands and Continents: Conversations and Contestations in and around the Pacific*, edited by Cynthia Franklin, Ruth Hsu, and Suzanne Kosanke. *Literary Studies East and West* 17. Honolulu: College of Languages, Linguistics, and Literature, University of Hawai'i and East-West Center, 2000. ISBN 0-8248-2365-6, xxx + 275 pages, notes. Paper, US\$28.

They say that the title of a book gathers its contents. But this title does no such thing. Rather, it alerts us that thematically, geographically, generically, the contents of this book are so diverse that they cannot be named in the title—a problem apparently compounded by the text being a conference proceedings (the first MELUS conference in 1997). Yet, after reading this book, I believe it to be a text of real interest and value to scholars in a range of fields. The diversity of texts and approaches allows a range of complex positions and locations that demand reflection from the reader. Whatever the difficulties with the ordering of the essays (more on that later), the range of works is one of the most important strengths of this collection. I begin by outlining what I consider these strengths are.

First, while the collection is definitely located in Hawai'i, it is not parochial. It covers the Philippines, Fiji, Tahiti, the United States, and Hawai'i itself. More important still, it deals with the layering of subject positions that so characterize the Pacific: indigenous oppression, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese diasporas. These all require different approaches, and they necessarily afford different points of view.