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Ethnomusicology in Australia and New Zealand: A Trans-Tasman Identity?

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Introduction

In his contribution to a special issue of *Ethnomusicology* marking the 50th anniversary of the Society for Ethnomusicology, Stephen Wild raised the notion of an Antipodean ‘voice’ in ethnomusicology (Wild 2006), pointing to some of the particular directions that the field had taken in Australia and New Zealand. He singled out especially the disciplinary coexistence of ethnomusicology and musicology in trans-Tasman academia, the ascendance of ethnomusicological approaches within popular music studies in our region, and the enduring presence of, and advocacy for, Indigenous studies in trans-Tasman ethnomusicology as particular manifestations of this character. Wild’s observations echoed those of previous commentators (e.g. Kartomi 1984; Jones 1974) and have been rearticulated by others who have sought to more recently define ethnomusicological practice in the trans-Tasman context (e.g. Corn 2009; Bendrups 2013; Bendrups, Barney, and Grant 2013; Johnson 2010, 2013). In this chapter, which celebrates Stephen Wild’s contribution to our field, we take the opportunity to reflect anew on Wild’s invocation of identity, focusing on two broad questions: where did trans-Tasman ethnomusicology come from, and where is it

now located? Answers to the first question already exist in the public domain, especially regarding the biographies and legacies of early Australian ethnomusicologists, and it is not our intention to duplicate this information again, but to draw on existing resources in a new discursive context. The discipline's history in New Zealand is, however, less well recorded, and to this end, this chapter provides new reflections based on interviews with key ethnomusicologists in that country.¹ The question of where ethnomusicology is now located is answered more speculatively, through reference to the contemporary scholarly mediascape, and through reflecting on our own knowledge of the current professional circumstances of colleagues with whom we have both shared a journey in ethnomusicology since the mid-1990s.

While the act of interrogating the topic of a distinctive, Antipodean disciplinary identity may perhaps seem somewhat contrived and parochial, and bound up in critiques of interpretative authority (who are we, after all, to be speaking on behalf of an entire discipline?), it is worth noting that this very question of disciplinary identity has an enduring presence in ethnomusicological discourse in general (e.g. Merriam 1977; Shelemay 1990). Perhaps this is to be expected in a field in which identity (i.e. the role of music in relation to the expression of cultural identity) has been recognised as the key theoretical concern of the discipline's adherents (Rice 2010), but there is an irony in the fact that, even as ethnomusicologists have sought to provide deep, complex, and authoritative explanations and descriptions of the specific music cultures they study, there has been an enduring degree of fuzziness about the definition of their own field of research, which has become fuzzier, not clearer, throughout the postmodern era.

The self-assurance with which Jaap Kunst defined the scope of ethnomusicology in 1959—a field pertaining to the study of primitive and traditional musics, to the exclusion of art music and popular musics—did not last long. Indeed, the International Council for Traditional Music (formerly, International Folk Music Council), and its annual *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, has long been an international locus of the discipline, despite its folk roots. Meanwhile, as Bendrups has observed elsewhere,

1 The data collection part of the New Zealand research was undertaken with University of Otago ethical approval. The authors would like to thank the 10 respondents based at New Zealand tertiary education institutions for taking part in the project, each of whom provided invaluable information not only on their own knowledge of ethnomusicology in New Zealand, but also their own contribution to the discipline.

ethnomusicological topics account for a substantial proportion of papers presented or published within the context of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM), especially its Australia–New Zealand chapter (Bendrup 2013). Timothy Rice has repeatedly urged the ethnomusicological community to do more to define the discipline’s theoretical and methodological frameworks, while Henry Kingsbury, whose doctoral research was a noteworthy example of turning the ethnomusicological gaze towards a Western art music setting, somewhat provocatively asked if the discipline should be abolished. Meanwhile, Anthony Seeger declared that one of the key assets of ethnomusicology as a discipline was its paradoxical ability to draw energy and inspiration from other fields of research. More recently, Deborah Wong, when stepping down from her tenure as president of the Society for Ethnomusicology, reflected on the position of ethnomusicologists within their established work settings, inviting further commentary about how the negotiation of disciplinary identity may relate to institutional imperatives. Despite the international spread of ethnomusicology as a scholarly idea, it is still unusual to find named schools or departments of ethnomusicology outside of the USA. In light of these enduring discussions, we feel confident that our current contribution will be a useful one.

This chapter will now provide a historical context for ethnomusicology in Australia and New Zealand, drawing together interview reflections alongside comments from previously published sources. It subsequently considers these reflections in light of Wild’s characterisations of the field to give a general sense of where trans-Tasman ethnomusicologists have come from. The conclusion of the chapter expands this discussion to consider the current presence and places occupied by ethnomusicologists, ending with a consideration of how this contemporary context might relate to Wild’s notions of trans-Tasman disciplinary distinctiveness.

Historical context

Ethnomusicological scholarship in Australia and New Zealand can be categorised by two broad and sometimes overlapping timeline periods that help show trends and changes in key methodological approaches and geographical foci. The scope of field has necessarily been defined historically by its emphasis on Indigenous musics (especially in the early years of the discipline), and more recently moving toward a field

defined without cultural exclusion and primarily on methodological approach. For Aotearoa/New Zealand, the discipline of ethnomusicology has historically focused on the musics of the Indigenous Māori peoples, as well as venturing more broadly into Polynesia in the nation's Pacific location. Later, ethnomusicologists extended the scope considerably in their 'study of people making music' (Titon 2009: xviii) in more distant cultures and more widely in terms of music style, both home and abroad, and attempted to embrace music as an innate and culturally defined phenomenon of being human. For Australia, a similar pattern emerges, with the first generation of ethnomusicologists concerned primarily (though not exclusively) with Aboriginal musics, and subsequent generations expanding the field of study to include other regional cultures and migrant groups. This was especially the case after 1975, as Australian multiculturalism was increasingly embraced in public policy and scholarship.

Early descriptions of Māori music in New Zealand were undertaken mainly by travellers and researchers, many of whom were new migrants or visitors to the new British colony (see Johnson 2000). Within an ethnocentric paradigm, descriptions of Māori music have helped in the compilation of knowledge on Māori musical practices, but only within a historical framework of enquiry possibly distorted by culturally hierarchical frames of comparison that in the present day provide a problem of deciphering the written past. However, the musical activities of the Māori scholar Āpirana Ngata (1874–1950) were especially relevant in the first half of the twentieth century, and he left a record of some of the musical practices of Indigenous New Zealand (e.g. Ngata 1928, 1961, 1970, 1990). By the 1950s, Ethnic Folkways Records (based in the US) had released some LPs of Māori music 'recorded by the New Zealand Broadcasting Service in cooperation with the New Zealand Maori Affairs Dept' (Anon. 1956: 22–23). The recordings continued the vein of documenting the Indigenous musics of the world along the same lines that earlier folk music collectors had done in the early years of the twentieth century (e.g. Cecil Sharp, 1859–1924; Béla Bartók, 1881–1945; Percy Grainger, 1882–1961). An item in an early issue of the journal *Ethnomusicology* offered typical subject matter on New Zealand that was considered of interest to ethnomusicologists at that time, including a release on Capitol Records of *Maori Music of New Zealand*:

Side 1 was recorded in 1956 at a concert in Wellington of the Aotearoa group, consisting of full-blooded Maoris selected from a broad cross section of the community, and side 2 offers six items sung by ‘a group of 30 Maoris ... taken in hand by Mr. Gil Dech who, in a few weeks, welded their untrained voices into the polished combination that quickly became known as “The Rotorua Maori Choir”.’ The selections on this record show marked European influence on traditional Maori vocal styles and could be of interest in a musicological study of the dynamics of culture change. (McColleston 1958: 81)

Racialised Eurocentric tropes of cultural advancement through high art notwithstanding, this description at least reveals an expanding Māori presence in scholarly musical discourse in the mid-twentieth century.

The pioneer of early ethnomusicological research in New Zealand from the 1950s was Mervyn McLean. His first encounter with the study of non-Western music was as a Master’s student in music at the University of Otago, where he studied under the instruction of music professor Peter Platt, who was an amateur sitarist and particularly open-minded music scholar. Having completed his Master’s thesis (McLean 1958), McLean continued after a short break—teaching at a secondary school, teaching violin, and travelling overseas to Europe for about two years—to work toward his PhD from 1962 until 1965, also at the University of Otago under the supervision of Platt. McLean’s research followed a typical approach of ethnomusicological scholarship of the time, primarily focusing on the music as object in terms of recording, transcribing, and analysing musical parameters. McLean was perhaps the only scholar in New Zealand at the time to call himself an ethnomusicologist, and was the first PhD on such a topic in New Zealand (and the third PhD in music; McLean 2004: 39). His approach operated within a global field of study, and in terms of its contribution to the recently established discipline it celebrated the in-depth study of Indigenous music. The detail of his field notes provides invaluable contextual information for comprehension of the cultural context of music making (as well as the recording setting) amongst many Māori communities. At this time, McLean was concerned primarily with ‘genuine examples of indigenous Maori music’ that showed no (or very few) signs of Western musical influence (McLean 1958: i). His main collaborator and helper at this time was Col. Peter Awatere, amongst a number of others who helped with translations (p. ii). In his PhD (McLean 1965), McLean indicated a concern for a type of ‘fieldback’ (Tokumarū 1977), where ‘arrangements have been ... made to

deposit copies of recordings and texts with tribal authorities, and a series of transcriptions of songs ... [would be] published in the Maori magazine “Te Ao Hou” (p. xiv). More than 50 years after McLean first studied at the University of Otago, his book of 2004 filled many pieces of the cultural and reflexive jigsaw that is nowadays usually a part of the broader ethnomusicological methodology.

During McLean’s time at Otago, out of nine music subjects within the Honours programme, one was pertinent to the early years of ethnomusicology. This course was ‘Folk and Primitive Music’, described as ‘an introduction to Folk and Primitive Music—melody, rhythm, form; the social background’ (University of Otago 1956: 115; cf. Nettl 1956), and it continued as such until the late 1960s. At this time, the University of Otago was part of the University of New Zealand, which operated a college system in the main centres. McLean was the only student at Otago to take the course when it was offered in 1957 under Peter Platt, who had just started at the university as Blair Professor (Mervyn McLean 2015, pers. comm.). The paper was listed in the MA/MA Hons course offerings of the University of New Zealand from 1951 (University of New Zealand 1951: 122).

While such content helps show the opening up of music programmes to the musics of the world, it should be noted that in the New Zealand context the study of Māori culture had by this time already become a part of the university curriculum. The programme in Māori studies at Auckland, which was included as part of anthropology, included the study of *waiata* and some other performance styles in first-year courses, where students were given not only prescribed readings but also listening (University of Auckland 1960: 159). The main person who helped promote such cultural studies was Bruce Biggs, who was appointed to Auckland in 1952 and was one of McLean’s mentors who helped establish ethnomusicology at Auckland, along with McLean’s position at the university.

In 1963, as part of the university’s consolidation of its interest in ethnomusicology, Otago became one of New Zealand’s first institutional members of the Society for Ethnomusicology. Another New Zealand member was Ashley Heenan (1925–2004) of the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation in Wellington (Anon. 1963: 165, 173). Interestingly, ethnomusicology was not actually taught as a discipline per se in New Zealand when McLean first undertook his research, although he did spend time as a postdoctoral scholar at Indiana University

from 1965 until early 1968, working under the likes of Alan Merriam and George List, where ethnomusicology was taught primarily within folklore and anthropology (Richard Moyle, one of McLean's students, followed a similar path in the 1970s). On his return journey to New Zealand, McLean was appointed as a short-term assistant professor at the University of Hawai'i (McLean 2004: 134–42). This professional trajectory, journeying from the Antipodes, to an American centre, and then to Hawai'i before returning home, was also common to others at the forefront of the discipline's development in Australia. Stephen Wild, for example, has described his own tenure at Indiana as a strongly formative element in the development of his professional identity (Wild 2006).

Ethnomusicology courses were introduced at the University of Auckland in the early 1970s, which was New Zealand's only ethnomusicology programme until Allan Thomas introduced the subject to Victoria University of Wellington with a focus on Indonesia and, later, Tokelau. Auckland's focus was on Oceania, particularly during and after the third year of study (Mervyn McLean 2015, pers. comm.):

There were a number of reasons for this. To begin with there was my own primary interest which followed naturally from field work among NZ Maori and the Cook Islands. Secondly, although most of my students came from the Music Department, I was employed by the Anthropology Department, surrounded by staff and graduate students who spent much of their time in the field, among ethnic communities throughout the Pacific. Linguists were able to record music as well as word lists, and some of the archaeologists did likewise. One of my missions, decided upon long before I was employed by the university, had been to establish an Archive of Maori and Pacific Music. This became an official commitment along with teaching and research when I was appointed to the permanent staff after a year and a half as a research fellow, and three years of a Senior Fellowship in the Arts Faculty. The Archive went from strength to strength, documenting its Maori collections, amassing significant holdings of recordings from elsewhere in Oceania, and providing hundreds of free recordings to Maori groups and individuals who wished to learn traditional waiata and other songs from acknowledged master singers. During university vacations I continued mostly self-funded recording expeditions until all tribal areas had been visited and the Maori field recording program was brought to a close in 1979. By this time, attention had turned to larger scale initiatives. A main event in 1976 was recording the entire week-long South Pacific Festival of the Arts at Rotorua with a 3-man team supported by my own indispensable family as willing cooks and bottle washers. Finally, in the closing years of the next

decade came the Archive's Territorial Survey of Oceanic Music, funded jointly by UNESCO and the Polynesian Cultural Center of Hawai'i, resulting in no fewer than eleven successful field expeditions to different parts of the Pacific, each carried out by a qualified graduate student or established scholar with the help of a local co-worker. (Mervyn McLean 2015, pers. comm.)

In both New Zealand and Australia, early university programmes in ethnomusicology responded to experiential learning trends by establishing gamelan orchestras and other world-music ensembles, and embracing performance on some of the world's instruments outside Western musical practice. Gamelan orchestras are found at urban and regional institutions, servicing traditional music tuition as well as the creative work of composition students, as was frequently the case during the tenure of Jack Body at the University of Wellington, for example (Johnson 2006, 2014). In New Zealand, there are also composers, performers, and other scholars such as Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, Jack Body (1944–2015), Jennifer Shennan, Margaret Orbell (1935–2006), Hirini Melbourne (1949–2003), Karyn Paringatai, Angela Karini, and Richard Nunns, each of whom has contributed much to a body of scholarship of Indigenous and ethnomusicological interest. While these and earlier 'neglected peers' (Seeger 2006) often contributed to ethnomusicological thought in one way or another, these extra-disciplinary approaches to music research further complicate a standard definition of what ethnomusicology is, or indeed who might be an ethnomusicologist.²

Ethnomusicology as a discipline in New Zealand tertiary education was further influenced by Bruce Biggs (1921–2000), who pioneered Māori studies at Auckland University. 'He instigated studies of ethnomusicology and the setting up of the magnificent Archive of Maori and Pacific Island Music at the University of Auckland' (Pawley 2001: 1). Auspiciously, 'he made it a condition of his acceptance of the Chair³ that the University appoint Mervyn McLean (the leading ethnomusicologist specialising in Māori music) to a tenured post from which McLean could set up and supervise the Archive and introduce courses on Māori and Pacific

2 Other New Zealanders who have contributed much to ethnomusicology, but have not been based in New Zealand for the main part of their careers include Peter Crowe (1932–2004), who studied composition under Douglas Lilburn and later turned to ethnomusicology. In the 1970s he was a postgraduate student in ethnomusicology at Auckland. A specialist of Melanesian music, he resided in France and returned to New Zealand in the late 1990s. Also, Christopher Small is a graduate of Otago (with a BSc) and Victoria (with a BMus).

3 A Personal Chair in Māori Studies and Oceanic Linguistics at Auckland in the late 1960s.

music' (Pawley 2001: 9). McLean was able to gain employment in New Zealand at the University of Auckland in 1969, within its Department of Anthropology and working within its Māori Studies programme. He was succeeded by his own student, Richard Moyle, who both extended the department's music research domain to include Tonga and Samoa, and developed the area of Pacific Studies, eventually becoming Director of Pacific Studies there. McLean's position was, in some respects, similar in disciplinary setting and support to the likes of John Blacking in Belfast and Merriam in Indiana, not to mention the long association of researchers such as Grace Koch and Stephen Wild with the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

Like New Zealand, the earliest attempts at something resembling ethnomusicology in Australia were focused on Indigenous cultures, often appearing alongside studies of language and other aspects of culture in broad ethnographic studies. In both countries, this work preceded the demarcation of ethnomusicology as a defined field overseas, and indeed, by the time that seminal ethnomusicological texts of the 1960s were published (Merriam 1964; Nettl 1964), the study of Australian Aboriginal music already had established disciplinary homes within musicology and linguistics, and an emerging role in the development of an Australian compositional voice.

The aforementioned University of Otago Blair Professor Peter Platt provides a useful point of departure for this discussion. Platt relocated from Otago to the University of Sydney in 1956, where he stayed for the remainder of his career. In his new role, Platt would come into contact with some of the emerging scholars who became the mainstay of Australian ethnomusicology in the latter half of the twentieth century, and his influence is therefore meaningful. Platt was an advocate of music being understood in relation to its cultural context, and, as he admitted late in his career, an avowed fan of Merriam's work. He was also of the belief that a proper musicological training should reflect the musical cultures endemic to one's home, thus he strongly encouraged engagement with Aboriginal music and musicians, being the oldest continuing representatives of an Australian music. As Bendrups has elsewhere observed:

Australasian ethnomusicology was established on these foundations, with a generation of scholars (including Trevor Jones, Catherine Ellis, Alice Moyle, and subsequently Stephen Wild, Mervyn McLean, Richard Moyle, Allan Marett and others) establishing frameworks for the incorporation of Indigenous musics into the musicological mainstream. (Bendrup 2013: 51)

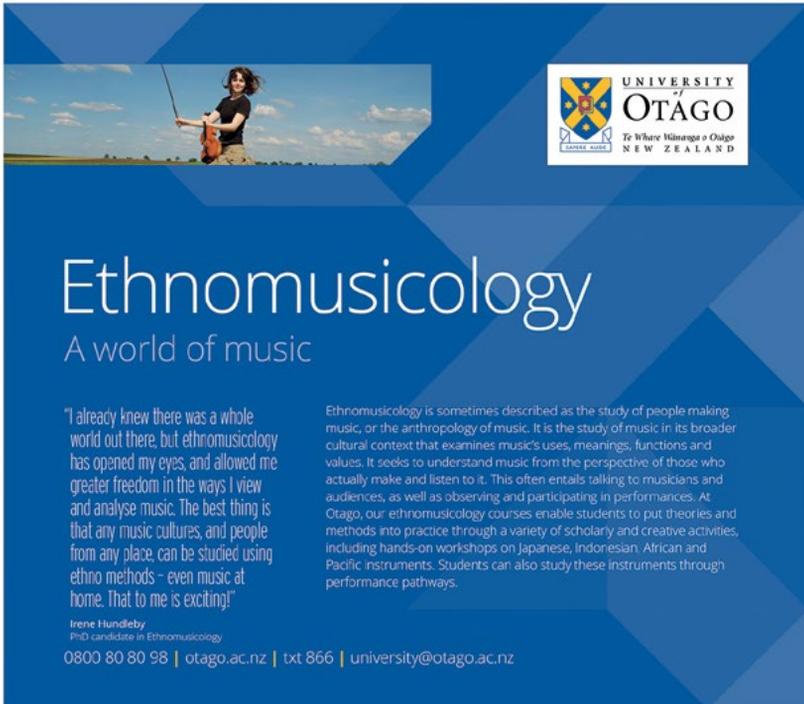
The early work of Catherine Ellis and Alice Moyle was of similar foundational importance. Bendrup was reminded of this recently when meeting two retired linguists, formerly located at the University of New England, who remembered Ellis as a colleague and were able to recall her work in some detail. As Mackinlay and Dunbar-Hall (2003) note, Ellis, Moyle, Jones, and others were also vital contributors to the early years of the Australian Society for Music Education, ensuring that the Society was inclusive of Aboriginal culture and education from the organisation's inception in 1967. The strong presence of ethnomusicologists and ethnomusicological methods within a body normally more focused on music education is a characteristic of Australian ethnomusicology that persisted throughout the remainder of the twentieth century, and which has also extended to New Zealand, where academics trained by ethnomusicologists have gone on to maintain a more prominent presence in education as a field, especially in schools and vocational (polytechnic) colleges.

Locating contemporary ethnomusicology

To counterbalance this wide-ranging history, then, we offer some observations about the ways in which the actions of the pioneers of ethnomusicology in New Zealand and Australia set the template for their discipline's future. Firstly, in both New Zealand and Australia, Indigenous musics were a prominent element in ethnomusicological work. New Zealand counted Māori researchers and performers (Tē Rangi Hiroa, Āpirana Ngata) as direct contributors to the scholarly developments surrounding Māori and Pacific musics. It took longer for Indigenous voices to be formally recognised in Australian music academia, but there are now many examples of Aboriginal scholars working at the heart of major government-funded research projects, and various prominent Aboriginal musicians have been formally recognised with honorary doctorates at Australian universities. Secondly, many of those who became

ethnomusicologists first experienced musicological training, or were otherwise musically trained, in some aspect of the European art music tradition. Today, in both Australia and New Zealand, ethnomusicology usually exists within music schools and conservatoria, and it continues to be the case that students encounter ethnomusicology after, or as a result of, their initial training in another practical discipline, whether in art or popular music. Thirdly, it appears that the subsequent generations trained by the first Antipodean ethnomusicologists have remained consistently ecumenical in their professional leanings, in some cases appearing equally prominently in areas such as music education, popular music studies, tourism, media studies, anthropology, or musicology. Some have entered senior management positions that transcend disciplinary definition, while others have entered into fields that are even more diffuse, such as mining or graduate research training.

To further complicate matters, the University of Auckland maintains a definition of ethnomusicology as a subfield of anthropology. The personal collection of John Blacking, one of the most significant scholars in the discipline, is located at an Australian university where, at the time of writing, there are no ethnomusicologists employed, nor any other vehicle for students to study ethnomusicology *per se*. Meanwhile, a significant government-funded project currently engaging with Central Australian Aboriginal communities through music, and which employs strategies entirely consistent with applied ethnomusicology, is led by a dynamic music researcher with an international reputation, but has little disciplinary presence within ethnomusicology. Even as universities are increasingly expected to provide a global perspective for students, a circumstance in which ethnomusicology could be seen to offer particular benefit, the identity of the discipline is still blurred, as in this recent example of promotional material from the University of Otago (Figure 1), where the ethnomusicology programme is represented with a photograph of a violinist—an instrument usually associated with European high-art music. Ethnomusicology is seemingly everywhere, and nowhere.



UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO
Te Whare Wānanga o Otago
NEW ZEALAND

Ethnomusicology

A world of music

"I already knew there was a whole world out there, but ethnomusicology has opened my eyes, and allowed me greater freedom in the ways I view and analyse music. The best thing is that any music cultures, and people from any place, can be studied using ethno methods - even music at home. That to me is exciting!"

Irene Hundleby
PhD candidate in Ethnomusicology

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Ethnomusicology is sometimes described as the study of people making music, or the anthropology of music. It is the study of music in its broader cultural context that examines music's uses, meanings, functions and values. It seeks to understand music from the perspective of those who actually make and listen to it. This often entails talking to musicians and audiences, as well as observing and participating in performances. At Otago, our ethnomusicology courses enable students to put theories and methods into practice through a variety of scholarly and creative activities, including hands-on workshops on Japanese, Indonesian, African and Pacific instruments. Students can also study these instruments through performance pathways.



Figure 1. Information sheet for Ethnomusicology, Department of Music, University of Otago

Source: Image licensed from istockphoto.com

Conclusion

Outside of named programmes (the most prominent being that offered at Monash and Auckland Universities, where there are currently three ethnomusicologists on each faculty), ethnomusicology sits in the background, beneath an appliqué of other music research fields. It persists as an influence that infuses more generic courses in musicology and popular music studies, and often uses the assumed identity of ‘world music’, which is perhaps more appealing to students put off by a seven-syllable ‘-ology’ that has no clear graduate employment prospects. However, even in the absence of named ethnomusicologists, music researchers in contemporary New Zealand and Australia utilise research methodologies that are music ethnographies or draw on some of the culturally centred approaches typical of ethnomusicology over the past 60 years. Just as Barney (2014) argues for a collaborative ethnomusicology with Indigenous partners, the cross-cultural understanding of people making music has the potential of applying Indigenous theory on local music, including Kaupapa Māori methodology (see Liamputtong 2010). New Zealand shows particular significance as a country where there is a distinct case for a bicultural approach to ethnomusicology, which is extended to the music of Pacific and migrant cultures.

An antinomy of methodological enquiry is inherent in the field of ethnomusicology in terms of self-identification with the discipline. The last few decades has seen a clear expansion of the discipline in its tertiary education context with more courses and evidence of doctoral research degree completions. However, while self-identification with the discipline helps the consolidation of ethnomusicological enquiry, the process of undertaking music ethnography or other qualitative research methods is nowadays increasingly part of other modes of scholarship on music. For example, undertaking field research by using methods such as observation, applied research, internship, interviews, or surveys are often at the core of ethnomusicology, but other music research such as education, business or practice-based enquiry have all included similar methods to ethnomusicology, but not necessarily identifying with the discipline. This is perhaps a consequence of ethnomusicology’s paradox of enquiry, where it may nowadays claim to be a ‘study of people making music’ (Titon 2009: xviii), but continues to be dominated by music research of cultures that are usually other than one’s own.

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