Chapter 4

The current scene
This chapter investigates changes in stringband related performance events, social dynamics of stringband ensembles, style relationships with power bands, the use of technology, and mass media influence. While not meant to provide an all-embracing representation of the stringband scene in PNG today, an attempt will be made to demonstrate changes in a range of contexts related to those discussed previously in chapter two. The following descriptions of village pati and stringband resis, which have changed in both nature and frequency, illustrate important aspects of such change.

4.1 Performance Contexts

In 1992 I spent two weeks in Busamang village, near Salamaua, to the east of Lae in the Morobe Province. One evening over the weekend a dance was held in a central area of the village. A small fee was charged for entry into a fenced area consisting of coconut fronds about three metres high enclosing a space approximately thirty metres long and twenty metres wide. A generator located about fifty metres outside the fence provided power for an amplification system and electric guitar, bass and keyboard amplifiers. While most people were in their teens and early twenties, all generations were present. The band played a selection of local rock, stringband songs and overseas rock numbers. The band played brackets of about an hour alternating with cassette recordings during their breaks and the dance continued until the early hours of the morning. The band was from another village and were well known in the area for travelling for a hire fee to various areas and performing. They were one of the few groups within an hour or so of the village by speedboat who owned adequate equipment to perform as an amplified power band. This is a good example of a more recent version of pati based around a live band, albeit powered rather than stringband. Examination of more recent events in the Hood Lagoon area serve to illustrate some of the changes that are occuring in relation to such events.

While most villages in the Hood Lagoon area of Central Province do
not have regular stringband events, Babaka village retains a relatively active stringband scene. On Christmas night in 1996 I attended a village dance which involved four bands located on the perimeter of a roped off area for dancers. One group would perform a song while villagers and band supporters, some dressed in grass skirts with colourful decorations, danced. Participants in the bands, audience members and the dancers ranged from small children to elderly people. At the completion of a song the next band on the perimeter would perform. These performances rotated for a couple of hours before the dancing ended. Though such dances mainly tend to occur at major events such as Christmas, and are therefore not as frequent as they were previously, other villages in the area rarely, if ever, have stringbands playing for dances. Neighbouring village Irupara, for example, had no such event at this time, though a smaller, less formally organised dance was held a few days after Christmas in 1998 featuring two bands of youths from the village, performing a selection of stringband and gospel songs to acoustic guitar and ukulele accompaniment. The growth of the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Irupara (whose membership currently represents about half of the population of the village) has led to a division of village festivities which had previously been under the influence of United Church related village committees. While the strength of stringband activity in Babaka might well be attributed to the status stringband has been accorded through the nationwide commercial success of the BB Kings, the dominance of the United Church in Babaka, and therefore a more coordinated organisation of events involving the whole village is no doubt a contributing factor as well.

Alewai is the next village south of Irupara and I attended a dance there in 1994. This was in an open area of the village backing on to the beach. A generator provided power for an amplification system and the music was a combination of commercial recordings of local and overseas popular music. Participants were almost exclusively young people in their teens and twenties, and much of the music played was popular in Port Moresby dance
venues at the time. This represents a change from what would have transpired in the 1970s, even the 1980s in some areas, where stringbands were the main provider of music for such events. No doubt partly as a result of easier access to commercial recordings and increased exposure to recorded music, listening to cassettes is a very popular pastime amongst young people in this area. While I was staying in Irupara young men would often sit up together at night, quietly listening to cassettes until three or four o’clock in the morning. These cassettes included Central Province artists, although the selection was generally from a wide range of areas in PNG. The listening was very active, with discussions of the origins and merits of various bands and songs. In comparison to my experiences amongst similar age groups in Australia, proficiency on guitars and ukuleles is much more widespread in PNG. People will often play the guitar to accompany a cassette recording, and in the absence of a cassette player, the current popular repertoire is likely to be accompanied by guitar. In December 1996, for example, I observed three young Irupara men perform an eclectic mixture of local music, stringband and overseas songs over a period of an hour or so; sometimes accompanying a cassette recording, and sometimes solo.

During my visit to Baiteta village in Madang Province, members of Simon Dou’s family described a dance that had been held in the village a month or so before my arrival. An enclosed area was built with walls of coconut fronds supported on a wooden frame. A generator supplied power for a stereo system which was manned by a DJ.¹ The dance started in the evening and continued until the early hours of the morning. It was largely attended by young people from Baiteta. In the last ten years or so this sort of dance has been more common than those involving live bands, and certainly much more common than those involving stringbands. Stringbands are more likely to perform as part of a celebration to mark a significant event in the village, but are less frequently used for providing dance music for entertainment. The music

¹Disc Jockey; dance venues in towns often provide a DJ for regular dances and private functions. The term is widely used in villages and someone, or a group of people from the village take on this role which carries a certain degree of prestige.
played at the dance was a mixture of local power band and overseas popular music. Simon Dou, a music student with whom I was staying described that too much of the music had been 'tekno'\(^2\) and that many older villagers had been unimpressed and left early.

Up until the late 1980s the main stringband in Baiteta, the Baiteta Bush Band Boys would have provided the music for such a dance. Today, the BBB's main performance opportunity is at a nearby resort hotel where they are paid to perform for tourists. Wearing a modification of traditional dress they perform a series of sets over a three hour period. Few other bands in this north coast region seem to use bamboo and perhaps this is one of the reasons they are hired by the hotel. From my experience and discussions with numerous people in PNG, stringbands using bamboo are generally associated with the North Solomons Province (see Kemoi 1996) and other parts of the Madang Province, though I have observed bands from other regions such as the Highlands using the instruments. This association has been used by a hotel in Madang town who regularly hire The Melanesian Bamboo Band, who specialise in bamboo accompanied stringband music. The use of the BBBs by a resort further out of town is a similar arrangement, and involves the representation of Melanesian culture to tourists. This is an interesting situation given that locally the band is seen to represent Baiteta village, performing in a style that is no longer in the mainstream of popular music consumption in the late 1990s.

Stringband has been used here as a form of identifying, or marking, something that is perceived to be appropriately indigenous, and which can act as more effective background music than traditional music, due to its musical accessibility (through similarities in the musical language with Western popular music forms) while retaining an image that is seen to represent tourist notions of Melanesian culture. Stringband therefore forms part of the soundscape of hotels wishing to selectively indigenise their habitat for the consumption of a

\(^{2}\)In PNG this term is used to describe modern overseas dance music, and tends to include techno, hip-hop, house, and more mainstream variants that borrow from these styles.
tourist market.\textsuperscript{3} There are parallels here with the idea of tourist art, though such contexts are fairly rare in PNG today due to the small scale of the tourist industry in comparison to other places in the Pacific such as Fiji and Hawai‘i.

These brief sketches generally indicate a reduction in the use of stringbands to provide music for live performances such as village dances. Increasingly, stringbands appear at formal functions, the primary aim of which seems to be to present an image of 'Papua New Guinean-ness'. Cultural groups performing traditional dances and music are frequently brought in to various events to give a Papua New Guinean identity to situations that have little, ostensibly, to do with PNG culture other than business. In 1997 I attended a Mobil company ball at a large hotel in Port Moresby with a friend employed by the company. Prior to a series of speeches focusing on the financial success of the company, a stringband from a nearby village in Central Province performed. Members of the group wore grass skirts and other body decoration, and proceeded to sing a guitar and ukulele accompanied song characteristic of Motu speaking people to the west of Port Moresby. The song described Mobil's financial and social achievements, and had been composed by one of the band members to words written by one of the employees from the same village the group was from. The purpose of the group seemed to be primarily ceremonial, with the audience politely watching and applauding. After a couple more songs the group left, local and overseas pop music provided by a session band from Pacific Gold studios took over, with overseas dance music played through the sound system during their breaks, and the event transformed into a party that continued until the early hours of the morning.

I also witnessed a stringband preparing for a similar event, the Copra Marketing Board Christmas party, held at another large hotel in December 1998. The group was from another part of Central Province, and had the

\textsuperscript{3}See Goldsworthy (1997) for a discussion of the idea of idigenisation in music, described as the "conscious process of infusing a tradition with indigenous elements in order to make it more regionally specific and representative" (p. 15).
same combination of performers, guitars and dancers. They performed a brief set before a DJ hired for the evening played dance music until late in the evening. These examples demonstrate that stringband has moved from being a grassroots village musical style, into one that has been given a certain value of Melanesian custom, and is used to present Papua New Guinean-ness for the more formal parts of social functions. As stringband is largely recognised as being a pursuit common to an older generation, younger people are more involved with modern power band music, which has yet to enter the realms of custom in the same way. The purpose here is not to lament the demise of an acoustic live ensemble performance, but merely to point out one of the ways in which the scene has changed over the last ten years or so.\textsuperscript{4}

Stringband resis have become an integral part of cultural shows and independence celebrations. The Goroka Show in 1994 consisted of a large oval with numerous traditional singsing groups performing simultaneously, an adjacent stage area for power band performances run by Pacific Gold Studios and an area for commercial stalls, food and drink vendors. Between the traditional performance area and stage, a number of stringbands gathered, honing their acts before performing at scheduled times in a stringband competition interspersed between power band performances. Most of the stringbands were from different areas of the Highlands and the groups generally consisted of young men with one or two older men as musical leaders or managers. There were anything from three to eight guitars, some of which were amplified by rewiring portable stereo cassette player-recorders,\textsuperscript{5} and some groups had PVC or bamboo basses.\textsuperscript{6} The players wore various bilas including leaves, grass-skirts, face markings, armbands and head-dresses. One band had several women with them who danced as the band played. Each

\textsuperscript{4}Somewhat ironically for someone researching stringband music and changes in performance context, at the gig described above I was performing in a jazz band for the Friday night crowd in an adjoining bar.

\textsuperscript{5}This is a common amplification method employed throughout the country and consists of one speaker held or taped to the guitar soundboard, rewired into the microphone input of the cassette player to play back through the single speaker still in place.

\textsuperscript{6}PVC pipe is a popular alternative to bamboo because of its durability, and the fact that it doesn't change pitch over time as bamboo tends to when it dries out.
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band had a placard displaying the band’s name and area of origin. It was clear that a number of relatives, friends and other villagers had travelled with the bands or met with them in town to build a considerable entourage. Most tourists at the show were attending the traditional group performances, while a predominantly young Papua New Guinean crowd attended the performance of power bands on a stage nearby.

Another example of stringband resis emphasising humour and the placement of stringband music as an older, less sophisticated musical practice is provided in the following description. A stringband competition was held at UPNG in 1993 as part of independence celebrations. I was invited with a colleague to formally judge the event. A number of groups performed, all fairly well organised and prepared, though it was clear that several groups had joined in to provide more comical relief than anything. One group had dressed in imitation of Australian Aboriginals, another band consisting of students from the Hula area had men dressed as women as their main feature, and bands represented a wide range of provinces. One of the Madang bands was judged to be the winner based on a set of criteria that we, as music staff, had been asked to establish. It was quite clear that the humorous aspect was essential to the success of the stringband competition in the university setting. Many students have described to me their perception of stringband as being a grassroots village style, focusing comments on a perceived lack of musical sophistication. One might expect such a view from students who form part of an educated elite in PNG, particularly when speaking to a lecturer from overseas such as myself, in an attempt I sense to distance themselves from musical practices they perceive as being of little importance outside purely local contexts. As a lecturer in music my own interest in stringband music has often been regarded with a combination of amazement, amusement, disdain or outright confusion by some students. However, many students became enthusiastic participants in discussion of the genre once they knew of my interest.7

7Others still remain negative - one visual arts student responding to a discussion of
4.2 Stringband social dynamics

Despite the reduction in popularity as a major source of musical entertainment in the village, stringbands often exist as an important social organisation for young men. Increasingly, the ensemble is seen as a practical and accessible means by which they might make the transition to recording in a studio, and even become a power band if opportunities arise. The following description is an example of this. The members of the Mokinnies Stringband come from Toto and Medebur villages, just south of Rurunat (see figure 1.4). They recorded several albums and still perform today, though some members have left the original group to form another band. I recorded the band at a haus smok (Tok Pisin term for a small building for drying copra) between the two villages where young men gather to fish, cook and practise. The name Mokinnies is a concatenation of a vernacular expression used by the family of band members to express their annoyance at the amount of time spent in this isolation from village life. Young men in the area are expected to live in a different house to their parents from their early teens as part of a process of attaining independence. Stringbands provide an important social pursuit for male youths and have become part of the social structure of village life in many respects. In an interview in January 1997 members described a plan to save enough money to buy instruments and amplification equipment, with the aim of becoming a power band and recording commercially. They expressed the view that being a successful power band was an important goal and represented their idea of musical success. As a result, members describe a conscious style change that has occurred in the last few years to accommodate the potential movement to power band.

The growth of the recording industry has created an interesting situation with regard to the composition and performance of new songs. The Mokinnies are very protective of new songs in the fear that they may be used by an already established power band for recording, and therefore profit. Copyright stringband music suggested that I should focus on music of more ‘importance’ and indicated that he felt the university was no place for stringband to be considered seriously.
law is not yet enforceable in PNG (Niles 1996, p. 58) and though there have been methods of dealing with the traditional ownership of music, in the context of the mass media and a national market these systems are ineffective. Power bands are seen as more effective ensembles in their potential for popularity and commercial success, and these stringband musicians are attempting to protect their own interests from a relatively weak position in relation to the industry. During a trip to Irupara village in January 1997, village elder and leader of the Young Papo’s band, Kila Gulukune Kalo described a visit he received by popular recording artist Ronnie Galama from Maopa village. Galama had asked him to use some of his songs for an album he was making, and Kalo had refused, as he felt that he would not gain financially and Galama was not prepared to agree to an appropriate payment in compensation. Less considerate musicians have used songs in many cases without permission, or at least that is the perception amongst people for whom the song is significant. An example of this is the song *Kekeni KR* which was composed for a woman from Irupara village by a stringband musician from Alewai in the 1970s. This was featured in a recording by George Luff and received considerable FM radio airplay in 1998. While some accounts suggest permission must have been attained, many Irupara villagers are unaware or don’t trust this, and although considerable delight is outwardly expressed at hearing a familiar song with local subject matter, I sense an underlying resentment at its use by musicians from another area. People involved have little recourse to legal assistance due to the absence of copyright legislation and access to funds required to pay legal costs.

The growth in the music industry and popularity of FM radio, has no doubt played a role in widening musical choices for rural as well as urban dwellers. The proliferation of cassette players and the easy availability of commercial cassettes (including pirated copies of overseas bands) has also contributed significantly in this regard. There is a sense today in which stringband is the preserve of a group of enthusiasts who enjoy performing such music. The availability of guitars means a stringband is the most easily
viable musical ensemble, although the use of the ensemble as a transition stage to becoming a power band with better commercial recording prospects is more prevalent today.

Radio was discussed in chapter two as providing an important media in distributing stringband to a wider audience. It also acted as an important source for the distribution of popular overseas music, in particular country and western music. Upon independence, the National Broadcasting Commission (later Corporation, and known as NBC) started, initially with the AM Karai (Tok Pisin for cry or call) service, then branching into the commercial wing with the FM station and associated recording studio Kalang (Philpott 1995). In 1994 the commercial station Nau-FM started, followed by a primarily Tok Pisin station, Yumi-FM, broadcasting mainly local music. NBC has suffered in recent years from a lack of funding and although many of the provincial radio stations still exist, dated equipment and a lack of maintenance has meant that many close down periodically. Karai broadcasts programmes including stringband music, local commercial power band, overseas and traditional music, as well as documentary, health awareness, interview and talk back programmes. Nau-FM and Yumi-FM broadcast varying combinations of overseas and local power band music, with virtually no stringband music. Kalang includes some stringband music, and in its recent move to cater for an older age bracket it is likely to include more. The commercial FM stations can now be received by many rural locations and are becoming much more popular in these areas, increasing their already considerable urban listener base. Radio also mirrors this reduction in the popularity of stringband music in conjunction with the rise in popularity of local power bands and overseas music. The current popular music scene exhibits influences from numerous popular music sources including reggae, rock, pop, heavy metal and stringband. Some examples of the influence of

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8See Webb (1993, p. 105) for a discussion of the use of a melody from a song recorded by Jim Reeves in a Paramana Strangers song for a direct example of this influence.

9The term 'live band' is increasingly used to describe power bands, especially as it becomes the most prominent popular music ensemble. For consistency however, power band is used for the remainder of the thesis.
stringband guitar style in power band music will now be investigated.

4.3 Power bands and stringband style

Quakes are a contemporary power band under the management of Pacific Gold Studios. They use instrumental features characteristic of East New Britain stringband music amongst a multitude of influences. Triplet ukulele rhythms and *faiv-ki* guitar parts are the main aspects of stringband style in a fusion also containing reggae keyboard 'chanks', bass parts characteristic of much local power band music, and MIDI drums exploring a mix between rock and dance rhythms. The band has recorded several albums and have had a number of hits in the PNG music charts. This style has been described to me as 'contemporary stringband' by ex-graduates of the Faculty of Creative Arts at UPNG, Sarah Mumugao (an NBC employee in the programming department), and well known musician Julie To'Liman-Turalir. The use of the term contemporary is interesting in that it perhaps carries associations more than merely indicating the present, as the term is used frequently by people associated with FCA to refer to a style of music that consciously incorporates traditional PNG music and instruments (Crowdy 1998).

The popular power band Sagothorns is an extension of the idea of a group playing electric instruments, but drawing heavily on style elements and repertoire of stringband music. Webb uses the term *pawa-stringben* as an alternative to a 'Six-to six' or 'Tavern band' under the power band category in his list of PNG music types (Webb 1993, p. 103) and this can be used to largely categorise the Sagothorns. Prominent syncopated ukulele parts (based on a straight four semiquaver, rather than triplet feel) and lead guitar lines utilising figures common in much East Sepik stringband music are evident. The band had a major hit with the song *Kela* (Tok Pisin for bald and slightly deprecatory depending on context) from their album *Igat Kik*.

\footnote{Chanks' refer to the stabbed chords occurring on beats two and four characteristic of reggae music. Though originally consisting of sharp upward strums on an electric guitar, this feature is often played on keyboards or with downwards strums in PNG reggae styles.}
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(Tok Pisin for ‘it’s got kick’) which several Sepik students have described to me as being from the stringband repertoire in the area around Wewak town.\textsuperscript{11} These same students indicated the activity of numerous electric stringbands in the Sepik area, villages and towns, and posit this as an important defining feature of East Sepik popular music.\textsuperscript{12}

In chapter three recordings including members of the Young BB Kings band were analysed. Their commercial recordings have continued in the acoustic stringband style pioneered by their older relatives, the BB Kings. A similar continuation of a stringband has occurred with another band from the Central Province, the Paramana Strangers and the continuation band PSII (PS standing for Paramana Strangers). Consisting of younger relatives of the original band, PSII has continued performing and recording PS songs, though with a more modern power band sound drawing from rock and reggae, including drums, keyboard and bass.

Stringband as a style can be seen to function as a transition genre to power band music from these examples. Indeed many early power bands, and those playing in village contexts are really electrified stringbands as posited by Webb (1993, p. 102). There is a sense in which these examples demonstrate the construction of more urban features of identity in that band members today are more likely to divide their time between the village and urban centres such as Port Moresby.

\textsuperscript{11}Personal communication during a course on PNG popular music I taught at UPNG in 1997.

\textsuperscript{12}These distinctions between a musician’s area of origin and musical style are illustrated in an anecdote from a student performance at UPNG in 1997. A band consisting of students from the East Sepik Province walked on stage and began setting up electric guitars, bass and a keyboard. The drummer was absent at this point. After a considerable delay, a Tolai student walked on stage holding a pair of drumsticks and sat down at the drum kit. The audience were prepared for some local music from the East Sepik Province following an announcement by the lead singer, and the sudden appearance of a Tolai musician, well known for his fluency and experience with ENB stringband music met with howls of laughter, which continued throughout the performance.
4.4 Summary

Discussions with musicians active in the stringband scene during the 1960s and 1970s all describe being part of a vibrant social dance and celebration scene. These were regularly held, almost every weekend in some cases and involved bands travelling from village to village to perform, often competitively. As stringband music has slipped from being the mainstream popular music consumed in Papua New Guinea - deferring to the more ubiquitous local power band cassette music - so it has slipped from being a prime provider of dance music. The stringband is used in celebrations, cultural shows and the like and is very much part of the musical culture in the way that it is included along with other forms such as traditional music. There is a sense in which stringband music has become the preserve of enthusiasts of the stringband style, and those who wish to obtain skills in order to attempt recordings and performance as power band musicians. Stringband music is no longer part of the mainstream of popular music making in PNG and has increasingly found a place regarded more as part of an older musical tradition. Links between the power band and stringband scene through repertoire and musical style, particularly evident in the music of the Sagothorns and through stringband influences demonstrated by the Quakes band demonstrates the importance of stringband music in the contemporary scene in that it forms an essential component of a popular music continuum in PNG popular music. This will now be investigated further in the final chapter, where conclusions will be drawn through linking the material discussed in previous chapters.
Chapter 5

Conclusion
Several main threads will be drawn in this conclusion that are associated with, but extend beyond, the original aims as presented at the beginning of the thesis in chapter one. The first of these is the importance of the integration of stringband music into the fabric of village and inter-village life. This tends to exclude the area of urban stringband music as a result of my research focusing on particular village locations. This weakness is noted, but can be qualified with the fact that most stringband music activity in which regional styles are clearly recognised seems to have occurred in rural areas, and that the more complicated intersecting relationships found in urban music-making probably require a complete study in itself. Chapter two, in delineating the processes and historical flow of stringband music from its origins to its spread and significance throughout various parts of the country, has indicated such integration through the nature and quantity of performance contexts in which stringband music has been composed and performed.

The development of stringband style and integration into village life are dynamically linked. When music is composed, performed and becomes popular locally, other bands gain inspiration and momentum as well. This is particularly evident in the competition generated by inter-village performances and resist. This process can be thought of as an ongoing reinforcement of the local scene. Throughout this process, the guitar as a material item has been important in terms of assigning status to those who own and play the instrument. Admittedly this material culture aspect has been neglected in this study, but the few observations that were made on this subject by the people I interviewed do make it important as a consideration.

Chapter three demonstrated that tunings, where prominently used in a particular area (such as the Hood Lagoon, or East New Britain) are, or were, played in a manner involving an associated playing style and technique. The constant repetition of related phrases and figures in particular places, consistently, on the fret-board demonstrates this. The differences between these guitar styles leads to a variety of stringband textures in different areas. These
two ideas, therefore, give credence to the thesis initially posed. Supporting
this as well is the fact that Papua New Guineans, the best-equipped string-
band style differentiators there are, use these tunings to not only describe
the guitar styles (such as Samoan or *faiv ki*), but that they use these to
assist in regional descriptions of style. In the case of *faiv ki*, a fairly widely
distributed tuning, regional description is added to the tuning term, so that
people will say East New Britain *faiv ki*, or use another term to indicate the
sub-styles in which *faiv ki* plays a part (Gordon's for example). The prolific
number of stringbands that have existed in PNG, and the numerous styles
and sub-styles that have developed, and the various ways in which aspects of
those styles have been incorporated into the current popular music indicate
that a study such as this is only scratching the surface of the musical style
complex that exists.

While these points hold for the narrow sample of examples analysed in
this thesis, the examples analysed and discussions held in Madang indicate
that the issue of guitar style and stringband style is not one of a simple, linear
development of a single line of stylistic evolution. Guitar styles appear to
have changed, sometimes fairly abruptly, through the history of stringband,
either setting up a new stylistic line of development, or an alternative and
parallel one. The reconstruction in Rurunat demonstrated this quite clearly.

Stringband music has had to negotiate a delicate balance between inno-
vation and stylistic continuity to survive as part of the village music-making
scene. Music students have often related to me that they find the musical
taste of villagers (particularly older ones) quite conservative and resistant to
too much change. This is not really all that surprising, given that some sense
of continuity has already been posited as being essential to the once ongoing
popularity and existence of the genre. Looking at changes over a broad time
span tends to accentuate the changes that have taken place. It is therefore
reasonable to accept that people involved in producing the music over a more
normal lifetime of stringband interest would see things as staying more or
less the same from year to year.
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Guitar style is by no means the only, or even the main, determining factor in defining and recognising stringband style. Language, particularly the vernacular, but also different accents of Tok Pisin, vocal timbre, rhythm and other instrumental styles (such as the bamboo) represent important factors as well. The depth of subtle style difference and the nature of style change over the history of stringband music indicate that the situation is best described as a style complex. At the broadest point of view, there are regional styles. From the regional perspective, these have changed over time, and there are further regional sub-divisions of style that can be made (Madang being an example of this). Even at the village level, there are further, more subtle, differences between bands and finally individual players who make up the personnel of those bands. The nature of this style complex is also not particularly surprising given the nature of PNG society, with the multi-layered complexities people daily navigate from the level of national, regional, village, to family relationships. This parallel is interesting, and without necessarily positing a direct causal reason for its existence, a brief discussion of the idea of music actually constructing group identity, and therefore the notion of cultural construction will elucidate such relationships between the social, and the musical.

Frith (1996), in discussing identity as a process rather than an entity which can be directly reflected by cultural practices such as music posits the following comment regarding music and group identity:

What I want to suggest, in other words, is not that social groups agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities (the assumption of the homology models) but that they only get to know themselves as groups (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgment. Making music isn’t a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them. (p. 111)
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Since the Second World War, ideas regarding social structure, boundaries of interaction, education and all manner of other social factors have undergone considerable change. Based on this idea of music living ideas, many of the developments in stringband style, performance contexts, and above all the ways in which these have undergone varying degrees of change, are seen more clearly. This suggestion however, although an apparently neat means of attempting to explain complex musical and social relationships is not without weakness. I have perhaps moved dangerously close to the concept of equating authenticity with ‘unself-consciousness’ that Jolly refers to; that is, stringband as local village unself-conscious behaviour, and therefore ‘authentic’ in some way, and that then neatly contributing to the construction of social identity and culture. Jolly (1992, p. 58) questions, “… is anyone, anywhere, anytime “simply living” their culture without an awareness of cultural alternatives?” raising the whole idea of a “…dichotomy between authentic custom and inauthentic kastom” and the political and cultural academic minefield to which it leads. The answer lies in the middle of these extremes. Stringband is a tradition that, as a result of its development into regional styles, and its integral incorporation into village and urban life of a large proportion of the population can be used to represent, and construct notions of identity at a broader level. Michael Webb, in a discussion during the 1997 Ivilikou PNG Music Conference and Festival presented the notion of popular music as shared national culture in PNG, following comments from the Executive Director of the National Cultural Commission at the time, Dr Jacob Simet, that the nature of PNG’s diversity led to difficulties in establishing a national identity through dance, theatre, music and visual art (see also Niles 1994).

The popular music scene has played a significant role in this regard and stringband has been a dynamic musical practice within the scene. It has constantly transformed itself with the changing social fabric of village and urban society. There is an important sense in which stringband music has acted in formulating, expressing, and constructing notions of identity in a changing social perspective prior to independence. The current popular commercial
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Music scene has drawn on these processes and musics in its development since the late 1970s. While the notion of PNG popular music as a form of national culture is an important suggestion, these issues of regional variation, production and consumption are embedded in the scene so integrally that their consideration must form part of such a notion. Stringband and its development within areas representing a range of village, village group and provincial relationships can be seen as representative (constructive even), of the changes in identity relationships occurring within PNG society through the 1960s and 1970s. Of interest to this discussion is the way in which some of those expressions rely on musical style, performers, and images representative of specific areas of the country mixed with more national elements. Webb (1993, p. 43) provides an excellent example of this with the image of a line of BB Kings band members sitting on the steps of the National Parliament building on the cover of the BB Kings album titled National Parliament. There is an obvious regional cohesion in the appearance of the band members (many are actually related), underneath a work of (then) modern architecture inspired by Sepik design. I am not suggesting that this is particularly surprising given the nature of PNG society, but it is an important issue related to musical style discussed in this thesis.

The means by which the analysis has progressed here does illustrate, however, important aspects of local regional styles and the processes by which they have developed. Further studies, particularly in areas in which stringband is a relatively new phenomenon (such as the Highlands) will no doubt reveal a different set of relationships relevant to the social and cultural situation of the time. Stringband music represents an important part of the popular music style continuum in PNG, and its dynamism socially and stylistically indicates the importance of popular music and its flexible approach to multiple source influences, recombination and fusion.

\[1\text{See Webb (1993, pp. 95-6) for a discussion of the notion of a continuum of musical change between different PNG music types.}\]
In considering musical style, regional and national identity, it is vital to maintain a wider perspective in considering the nature of the style development process. As mentioned in the opening chapter of this thesis, regional style needs to be discussed in relation to the PNG public perception of style difference. The development of regional styles should not be mistaken for a conscious, ongoing attempt at difference on the part of local communities. Rather, style development is a much more amorphous and indefinite process resulting from many years of musical change in numerous geographical locations.

The fact that the guitar plays a role in contributing to the process of style development in stringband music is the most important observation to be made as a result of this study. In the middle of the twentieth century, guitars were rare items amongst Papua New Guineans, and did not form a widespread or common part of the musical life of people. By the end of the twentieth century, guitars formed the instrumental basis of one of the most significant popular music genres in the country. The innovative playing styles, in many cases associated with particular unique ways of tuning the guitar leaves little doubt as to the malleability of the instrument as part of a popular music tradition that negotiates the complex range of urban, village, and inter-regional relationships that are so much a part of society in Papua New Guinea.
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Appendix: Recorded examples

2. *Vegalo vavine*, Babaka village, December 1996
4. *Ia Desi*, UPNG, October 1998
7. *Ignuta ughta*, Baiteta village, January 1997