Chapter 1

Introduction

A form of popular music known as 'stringband' has developed since the Second World War in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Stringband ensembles are a combination of voices, guitars, ukuleles and sometimes a bass instrument. Stringband music usually consists of secular songs with local subject matter sung in the vernacular or one of PNG's main linge franche.[1]

A variety of stringband styles have developed, and these are usually recognised and described by the PNG public in regional terms (Webb 1993, p. 6). Since political independence in 1975, Papua New Guinea has been divided into twenty provinces and one district (see figure 1.1) for political and administrative purposes. The broadest regional descriptions of style extend from collections of neighbouring provinces, such as the Highlands or New Guinea islands, to specific provinces. Finer regional discrimination is also made so that people from Madang, for example, might describe a band as being from the north coast of the province.

Elements that contribute to regionally described styles include differences in language, vocal style, melodic shape, rhythmic structure, and instrumental style. Factors that have contributed to the perception of different regional styles include radio broadcasts and the spread of cassettes following the growth of the local cassette recording industry (Webb 1993, p. 6). Unique guitar styles are prominent in stringband music, and one of the factors involved in the differences between these is the use of different guitar tunings.[2] Various tunings are used in different parts of the country, and are described by distinctive local names. *Samoan*, *faiv ki*, *tri ki*, *blu mounten*, *Spanish* and *sunset* are just some of the tunings commonly described by Papua New Guineans. The link between regionally described styles, guitar tuning and guitar style is the primary focus of this study. This tends to place other contending factors of style determination in the background. It is important to note, however, that the intention of this study is to focus on the contribution of guitar style to further elucidate an understanding of PNG stringband style.

[1]There are three linge franche in PNG; Tok Pisin, the most widespread; Hiri Motu, confined to the Papuan region; and English.

[2]Defined here as the set of inter-string interval relationships.

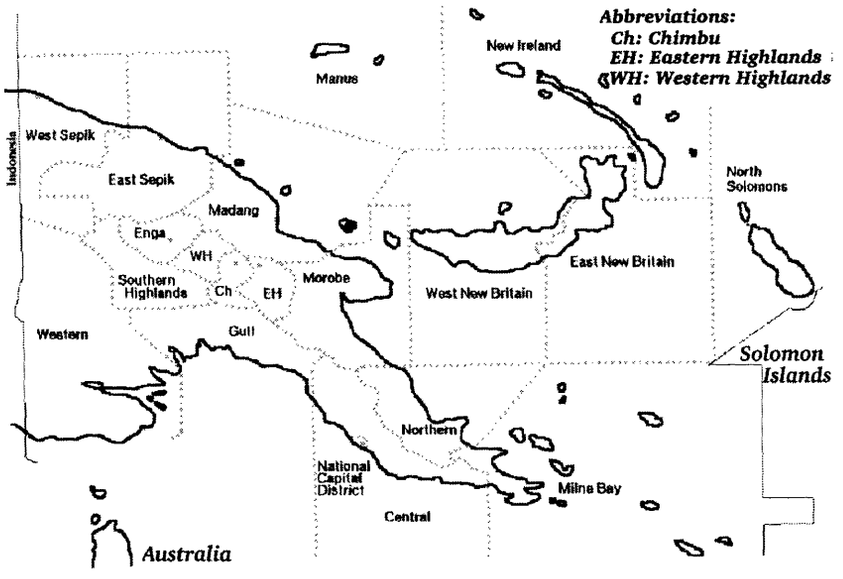


Figure 1.1: Map of Papua New Guinea showing provincial boundaries

If this runs the risk of over-emphasising the role of the guitar in determining style amongst the array of possible factors, then it is hoped further studies will follow to improve our knowledge of this under-researched area.

My interest in the stringband music of PNG started while working as a guitar tutor at the University of Papua New Guinea, where I taught for eight years in the 1990s. That role mainly involved teaching styles that Papua New Guinean students were less familiar with, and included Jazz, Blues, and Classical guitar playing. An interest in stringband and other local popular music led to a series of field trips, the purchase of numerous commercial recordings, and many informal sessions playing with, and observing, stringband musicians.

1.1 Aims

The main aim of this thesis is to investigate the potential of guitar tunings and associated playing styles in contributing to the determination of string-band styles that are described regionally. This is achieved through analyses of guitar playing techniques and characteristic musical figures and phrases associated with a selection of different guitar tunings from different regions of the country. Selected guitar parts from stringbands in three main areas are analysed. While this is a somewhat narrow sample from which to test a thesis that actually covers quite significant stylistic diversity, a detailed study will, I would like to aver, provide a solid base for possible further work in this area, since detailed comparative studies of stringband guitar style have yet to be carried out. The analytical approach is essentially musicological, and involves the transcription of a number of musical examples. This, however, is only useful when linked to the social context in which it is embedded. The very notion of regional style invokes a series of questions as to why, how and where that situation has come into being. Before embarking on the analysis then, the second chapter is devoted to mapping the development of stringband music to explore answers to such questions.

A lively popular music scene exists in PNG today, and bands with electric instruments, known locally as 'power bands' are the primary ensembles. Stringbands have moved out of the mainstream of the popular music scene since the early 1980s, though many of the stylistic traits characteristic of stringband style percolate through more contemporary combinations of sounds, and play an important part in the distinctive styles of current bands. These relationships are examined in the fourth chapter.

Before turning to examine the literature on PNG stringband music and the theoretical approach to be taken, some important terms need defining.

1.2 Terminology and definitions

The term stringband is used to describe both the ensemble, and the music that it plays. Context generally determines the meaning though where necessary, to avoid ambiguity, I will state either 'stringband ensemble' or 'stringband music'. *Tok Pisin* is the name of the main lingua franca and will not be italicised from this point on. Some terms that are used in Tok Pisin, but that are commonly used in English and are pronounced as such, will, in most cases, not be italicised. An example of this is the name of the dance occasion 'six to six'. This does present the possibility of some irregularity given that other English sounding terms such as *Faiv ki* is spelt using Tok Pisin orthography but this is a decision I have made based on my perception of common usage.

Region is a term used to describe the range of areas grouped together when used to describe stringband style. As mentioned previously, this may extend from a geographical area consisting of several neighbouring provinces (such as the Highlands), to specific provinces, a particular section of a province (the north coast of Madang Province, for example), and even village groups. References to regional styles or regionally described styles require this flexibility, as the range of these areas is considerable. Where relevant, particular locations are described in conjuction with region to specify relevant boundaries.

'Style' is a potential source of complexity in that it can be considered at so many levels in regards to a musical practice. Similarities and differences in musical structure as well as performance practice may be considered. Blum (1992) provides a useful overview of the nature of style analysis in ethnomusicology. Immediately apparent is the potential confusion the term can engender without adequate qualification. The term stringband style will refer to the collective features of similarity that allow categorisation. This is an area of potential ambiguity when the complexities of style are revealed, but this definition will serve as a useful starting point.

The Concise Macquarie dictionary defines 'style' as "a particular, distinctive, or characteristic mode or form of construction or execution in any art or work".[3] While this is adequate as a broad gloss covering an extensive range of fields, the actual elements, or combination of elements that construct such characteristic forms are of importance in relation to specifically musical aspects of style. For the purposes of this study I use an essentially musicological definition of the term. Differences in the combination of musical elements such as rhythm, melody, timbre, harmony, texture and form in a comparison between two or more musical examples determine a difference of style. Comparison of a series of these traits allows comments regarding style to be made.

Instruments tend to maintain the same role throughout songs in a complete repertoire. A guitar playing strummed chords, for example, will tend to play in the same manner in all songs. The same can be said of the picked guitar parts to be considered in detail in chapter three. This consistency of role results in the possibility of making important observations about stringband texture, and its resultant effect on style when compared with other bands from the same region.

By collecting together numerous examples that demonstrate similarities, broader levels of style may be discussed without diverging from this definition. I attempt to define important style features of stringband music including individual parts (guitar style for example), ensemble style, band style then regional style. These comments preface a more detailed examination of the analysis methodology in chapter three.

1.3 Review of literature

Papua New Guinea has provided fertile ground for ethnomusicological research. Numerous studies have examined the traditional music practices of specific groups, communities and villages. The relatively recent colonisation

[3]The Concise Macquarie Dictionary, 1982.

of PNG, the isolation of many communities and the existence of traditional lifestyles through the twentieth century (or at least lifestyles somewhat less influenced by modernisation, development and colonisation than many other parts of the world) has been an important factor in the selection of the area as a topic for research. Popular music in PNG has received less scholarly attention than traditional music and it is only really since the 1980s that it has been a focus of specific studies (Webb 1995, p. 233). Webb (1993) is the most significant work dealing with stringband music to date and provides an essential base from which to frame more detailed studies. This review of the current literature starts with an article examining general musical and historical issues related to inter-cultural contact, then moves to examine Webb's work in more detail before discussing studies that focus on the stringband music of particular areas and culture groups.

In an article providing an overview of inter-cultural contact and its impact on PNG music, Niles (1994, p. 84) points out that "Inter-cultural contact is not a new phenomenon in Papua New Guinea or other parts of the Pacific", and posits traditional trading ties and other social and economic contact to support this. The extent of recent change is important, however, and he notes that since European contact the exposure to music has been significantly different in content, quantity and diversity. Niles argues that religion, media and cultural shows have been largely involved in the introduction of new music, dance and associated performance contexts. Employment on plantations is also suggested as an important catalyst for musical interaction between different culture groups. In conclusion, Niles suggests that stringband might be the musical genre most likely to have the potential to express a national identity, but in commenting that few groups attain nationwide popularity he concludes that "music plays a minor role in developing a national feeling of unity" (p. 90). Identity and its construction, or expression, from the local level to the national level is an important issue in relation to music. The strongly regional affiliations of PNG society, moulded with the political reality of nationhood provide many challenges in attempting to negotiate the

complexity of musics in this environment.

This complex and multi-layered issue of identity in relation to popular music is tackled by Webb (1993), who provides an indispensable survey of PNG popular music history in his detailed study of lingua franca (primarily Tok Pisin) song. It is the most comprehensive text on PNG popular music and provides an important background to this study as his work deals extensively with stringband song. The detailed analyses of song texts investigating the complex uses of language in PNG are supplemented by important observations of instrumental style. In discussing the existence of regionally described styles he points out that "specific dances and their accompanying music (or guitar playing styles), have come to stand for particular provinces" (Webb 1993, p. 5). An example of this is provided in describing distinctive surface features of the Tolai stringband style from East New Britain Province (ENBP) as:

> a reiterated triplet rhythm over a duple meter (played on guitar and ukulele), multi-part vocal polyphony, melodic contours featuring a wide ambitus, and a specific vocal timbre... (p. 6)

In a later work, Webb (1995) observes the importance of guitar style, and its relationship to playing technique. In discussing the melody of a song by renowned East New Britain musician John Wowono he notes:

> it can be seen that this is very much a "five key" melody, that is, the melodic sequencing is determined by the tuning, and more specifically, the position and hence melodic possibilities of the chord-fretting hand on the guitar. (p. 430)

Webb's comprehensive study of the Tolai people and their musical history since colonisation (Webb 1995) contains important research on the development of stringband that can be used as a model from which to test developments in other regions. In considering the construction of identity for the Tolai in relation to stringband music he suggests a four phase process in

the development of stringband music in the area (Webb 1995, pp. 397-400). These may be summarised as:

- learning a new repertoire of songs (mostly Polynesian)
- the development of stringband ensembles and the *pati* system; original songs composed
- incorporation of aspects of traditional music practice; diversification of fine points of musical style; the emergence of an identifiable Tolai stringband sound
- a period of creativity and innovation; search for personal styles; commercial recordings; gradual decline of stringbands in relation to power bands

Specific aspects of Tolai stringband style are considered, including the importance of guitar style, and specific tunings associated with stringband music from the Gazelle Peninsula. In delimiting the scope of his research, Webb (1995) suggests that to reconstruct a detailed history of stringband coalescence in PNG would require:

> a detailed tracing throughout the islands of source style elements and of agents in their transmission, as well as documenting their subsequent transformations and rearticulations. (A close examination of plantation culture following the war would also be integral to such a project.) (p. 275)

Given the considerable spread of stringband music in PNG and the range of styles existing this would be a formidable project, and only possible once a series of more detailed studies have dealt with specific stringband styles from particular areas. In some ways this thesis can be considered a preliminary study useful to the aims of the above project. Of more immediate concern, however, is an examination of the nature of existing styles.

In covering the music of the Admiralty Islands (a remote island group to the north of the PNG mainland) Niles (1980) discusses the history of guitar and ukulele based song in the area. In the period just after the war ukuleles spread first, followed by guitars and then stringband ensembles. Initially the songs learnt were in imitation of Western and Japanese examples, then songs in local languages and Tok Pisin became more frequent. While the analysis of these songs focuses mainly on song texts, instrumental passages are described from a series of recordings from the 1950s onwards. Specific aspects of stringband style in the area are not defined (this would require a study in itself spanning the wider New Guinea Islands area), though common features of music texture are described, including the influence of hymn singing in "a full homophonic harmony to accompany the melody" (p. 208) of selected commercially released songs.

Kelsey (1993) deals with music of the Irumu people of Morobe Province and includes a number of transcriptions and analyses of stringband songs. He describes the popularity of stringband amongst youth in the village, and is mainly concerned with social context rather than comparative concerns of stringband style. In regard to its development he states: "The distribution of guitar-bands increased rapidly and widely with the expansion of internal travel" (p. 204), and the enthusiasm and popularity he describes in relation to young people in the area at the time is indicative of the situation in rural areas throughout the country.

Stella (1990) examines music from his own culture, that of the Banoni people from Bougainville Island in the North Solomons Province (NSP). Guitars and ukuleles were introduced in the early 1960s by Banoni who learnt to play the guitar "whilst working on plantations or attending schools" (pp. 58-60). Stella explains that "At first they played songs learnt at schools or heard over the local radio station..."(p. 59), then songs in the Banoni vernacular or Tok Pisin were composed. Stringbands were a male affair, with women initially only observing. Later, women became involved in dancing with men to the accompaniment of stringband music. This represented a significant

change from traditional dancing and courting practices which avoided public displays of contact between young men and women. Power bands became more prominent in the mid 1970s and "since then its popularity has surpassed that of the stringband" (Stella 1990, p. 60).

Waiko (1986, pp. 36-37), in a discussion of oral traditions amongst his own people, the Binandere of Northern Province, details aspects of musical and social change in relation to the introduction of guitars, the composition of guitar based songs and modifications to existing rituals and events as a result of these changes. Guitars were introduced in the late 1950s by evangelists and Binandere people returning to the village after being in urban centres such as Lae and Port Moresby. At first songs were sung in Motu, Tok Pisin and English, then songs in the vernacular were composed and used at existing feast events and traditional ceremonies. Waiko details an interesting story of conflict generated by a Christian Revival Crusade which advocated burying the dead to songs accompanied by guitar. Older people, familiar with more conservative Anglican beliefs chose traditional songs, and opposed the use of guitar accompaniment for such practices.

In certain areas of PNG such as NSP and Madang, stringbands have incorporated instruments simply known as bamboo or its Tok Pisin equivalent *mambu*. These consist of tuned lengths of bamboo struck by a firm piece of rubber (cut-down rubber footwear known as thongs are commonly used) to produce a resonant sound with a percussive attack. Kemoi (1996) discusses the development of the bamboo band which became popular from the 1960s in NSP, with a particular focus on the islands of Bougainville and Buka. He suggests two main possibilities for the adoption of the bamboo band in NSP. One suggestion is that western Solomon Islands students at Madang Teacher's College introduced the idea. Another, is that the idea had been introduced to the Bougainville and Buin areas through social interaction with people from neighbouring western Solomon islands, and that labourers from Madang working on plantations in Bougainville then brought these ideas back to mainland PNG. Kemoi suggests that the second theory is most

likely, though it seems reasonable to surmise that a combination of these is possible. As the ensembles became more widespread on the island changes were introduced and developed:

> Because of the level of competition, the people of Buka came up with major changes in the way the bamboo instruments are made and played. Originally, the bamboo band from the western Solomons did not have sharp or flat notes on the instruments. They had only diatonic notes which were used to play a boogie-woogie type rhythm. Nevertheless, when it reached Buka, the Buka people incorporated sharps and flats, allowing minor chords and a greater range of notes for creating melodies with their bamboo band. In addition, instead of boogie-woogie sounds, rock 'n' roll music was introduced due to Western music influence. (1996, p. 35)

Kemoi was involved in a revival of the form while studying at the Goroka campus of UPNG by forming a band with fellow NSP students. He describes its demise:

> During 1980 to 1988, the bamboo band became very popular. At the end of 1988, bamboo music became so popular and common that people got fed up and lost interest in it. Instead they switched on to Western music such as heavy metal and rap. The impact of Western music on young people is so great that they see the bamboo band as old fashioned music from the "good old days". (1996, p. 36)

Topurua (1996) describes examples of the construction and use of the bamboo in Bougainville, and makes the following comment regarding the types of music that are played:

> Nowadays bamboo bands in Bougainville can play *faiv ki*, string-band music, Pacific Islands music (*tamure* and *hula*), *solomon*

> dance songs, Papua New Guinea traditional songs, contemporary Papua New Guinea music, rock 'n' roll (fast and slow), reggae, boogie, and gospel. (p. 44)

This not only provides an insight into local style terminology (Topurua was a university student and part time bamboo band member in Goroka when this article was written), but also to the use of a guitar tuning name, *faiv ki*, in relation to what is clearly regarded as a style in itself. This will become an important issue when *faiv ki* is examined in detail in chapter three.

Miskaram (1996) has attempted a study of the diffusion of stringband styles in PNG. It is from the perspective of the field of geography, and attempts to "show how the evolution of string band styles has been influenced by socio-economic changes" (p. 2). The study includes some useful historical data (pp. 28-32 for example) in relation to the New Hanover area of New Ireland Province, but at times struggles to meld the idea of the development of musical style and the process of diffusion that contributed to the process. This is perhaps only to be expected from a work that takes a geographical, rather than ethnomusicological approach to the subject. Nevertheless, an attempt at defining broad regions of stringband style (p. 35) is consistent with public style categorisation at the broadest level. Perhaps the most significant point Miskaram (1996) makes regarding style and the importance of guitar style in particular is:

> The regions are classified in terms of certain distinctive characteristics... The method of differentiating the five string band style regions include the method of guitar/ ukulele playing, rhythm and tune of the song, most predominant theme of the song, song structure, variety of picking/ strumming methods and chord complexity and, the extent of traditional music influence. Of probably the most important criteria in determining these styles are method, style and complexity of picking/ strumming and, the

> role of traditional music in determining the rhythm of the song. (p. 34)

It is the idea of picking or strumming style and complexity, as described by Miskaram, that is the focus of the musicological analysis in chapter three of this thesis. Miskaram (1996, pp. 36-40) attempts to describe some of the style differences within each of the five main areas, although this is inevitably somewhat cursory due to the focus on processes of diffusion. Important observations regarding the process of diffusion, and agents involved such as schools, are highlighted, as styles "spread along communication lines such as by sea, air and land transport routes" (p. 41). In summary, Miskaram posits a number of important points in relation to stringband style, its historical development, and agents and catalysts of diffusion. The main gaps in the study are those involving issues of musical style. Chapter three of this thesis will attempt to fill some of those gaps, at least in relation to some of the styles, in a few of the main style regions described by Miskaram.

The influence of traditional music on stringband style that Miskaram (1996) has referred to in the previously quoted passage is an area of considerable complexity. The development of style can be considered to involve a series of 're-foldings' of source material back on itself so as to blur the original material through transformation. In that sense, the tracing of sources might be better examined through the processes involved, rather than a direct attempt at extracting obvious source material as musical artefact. Nevertheless, there are convincing examples of direct musical influences from traditional music (known as *singsing tumbuna* in Tok Pisin). Miskaram (1996, p. 34) mentions the role of rhythm as it relates to traditional music; that is, the rhythm of stringband music as being influenced by rhythms associated with traditional music. The triplet rhythm of East New Britain stringband music is perhaps the most obvious example of this. During the course of teaching a popular music course at the University of Papua New Guinea, a student from the Morobe Province posited that the reason much popular music from Morobe was so heavily influenced by reggae was to do with similarities in

rhythmic feel to traditional music in the area.[4] This disjoint smattering of examples poses more questions than it answers, and indeed represents a separate, though obviously related area of research in itself. I have deliberately decided not to pursue analysis that attempts to isolate such sources in deference to greater detail in an initial analysis from which a further investigation into this area would follow. Rhythmic influence is just one of the areas that would need investigation; texture, and the set of inter-related musical relationships that contribute to it is another, as the following discussion of some of Steven Feld's work demonstrates.

Through extensive ethnographic research into the Kaluli people of the Southern Highlands Feld (1988) has isolated a significant socio-musical concept known as *dulugu ganalan* in the vernacular. This is translated by Feld as 'lift-up-over-sounding' and is described as "the Kaluli sound, a local gloss for social identity articulated through human sonic essences" (p. 76). Feld (1988, pp. 78-9) expresses the concept as:

> For me, intuitively, 'lift-up-over sounding' feels like:
>
> -continuous layers, sequential but not linear;
>
> -non-gapped multiple presences and densities;
>
> -overlapping chunks without internal breaks;
>
> -a spiralling, arching motion tumbling slightly forward thinning, and thickening back again

Later in the article he describes aspects of 'lift-up-over-sounding' evident in the way guitars and ukuleles are played, pointing out the use of "sound clusters ... rather than conventional chords" (p. 96) and a dense overall texture with the addition of continuously overlapped voices. After a visit to the Bosavi region in January, 1999, Feld briefly described to me a proliferation of stringband activity over the preceding years, its use in group performance

[4]Discussion with Enos Kwara at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1997.

events such as a recent show that had been held, and ways in which stringband songs had started to incorporate important poetic features evident in traditional music in the area (see Feld 1982). At the stage of writing these observations were the result of more detailed research into traditional music than stringband, however they serve to illustrate the depth of possibilities in this area.

Prefacing the discussion of Kaluli stringband music Feld proffers the following stylistic generalisation:

> Blended voices in interlocked and overlapped polyphonies, in-sync and out-of-phase with strongly metric guitar or ukulele strums, is a pattern that characterizes much of the contemporary urban stringband music of Papua New Guinea and the Pacific area in general. (1988, p. 96)

Webb (1993, p. 6) quotes the same passage and suggests that "Such features can be readily identified in numerous early and current stringband recordings". The statement is, on the surface, remarkably descriptive in that it summarises some of the common characteristics of stringband music, though it does tend to conceal the style diversity that exists.

Philpott (1995) provides a broad discussion of developments in the popular music industry in PNG. While not focusing on stringband as such, he gives an indispensable survey of the development of the industry. The article is useful in understanding the recent domination of power bands in the PNG popular music scene, and the gradual demise of stringband as the principal popular music form. Although more recent PNG rock bands regularly travel to other parts of the Pacific, mainly Melanesian countries, stringbands have not travelled to the same extent. Philpott, however, points out that a stringband, The Paramana Strangers, were "the first ever national group to tour overseas" and "visited Fiji, the Cook Islands, Western Samoa and Tonga before their professional career ended in 1983" (p. 100).

While it is perhaps surprising that a musical form that has occupied such a considerable component of musical activity in PNG has received relatively

little attention in ethnomusicological research, that which has been carried out presents interesting possibilities for further examination. Music surveys including descriptions of stringband music indicate broad processes of change and a rough chronology of that change. The areas covered by the extant work demonstrate parallels with the processes of development Webb (1995) has described in detail. While these studies include analyses of specific songs in varying degrees of detail, the main aspect missing is a detailed discussion of specific elements of style and their relationship to broader categories of stringband styles in a comparative sense. Webb (1993) makes important observations of musical style, sources of influence, and processes of syncretism and stratification of these influences, though the broad sweep of the study tends to place them in the background against textual and social concerns. Webb (1995) investigates guitar style in some detail in relation to an open tuning known as *faiv ki* and highlights the significance of examining guitar style to better understand stylistic diversity in PNG stringband music.

What becomes clear from this examination of the available literature is that a comparative study of different stringband styles would be valuable in establishing the nature of style diversification and growth from essentially common sources, and in so doing provide an insight into the machinations of syncretism in the development of popular music in PNG. Prior, and integral to that is the need for further detailed analyses of specific guitar styles.

1.4 Theoretical approach

The study of popular musics, particularly in non-Western countries such as PNG, is aided by drawing from a theoretical lattice that connects a number of related fields.[5] Ethnomusicology, in drawing from anthropology and an ethnographic approach to data collection through fieldwork, provides essential tools to situate specific musical practices in their social contexts. In

[5]See Shuker (1994) and Negus (1996) for broad views of popular music theory. See Rice (1997, pp. 101-5) for a brief but useful summary of the directions ethnomusicology has taken regarding theory, and more particularly, its relationship to field work issues.

recognising the "intersecting contexts and networks" (Cohen 1993, p. 135) of popular music, the field (or multiple fields) of cultural studies provides a broader sweep taking into account mass mediation of cultural practices such as music, and the complex relationships between performers, producers, listeners, consumers and the society in which they live. Recent scholars in anthropology have approached these issues as well, and Appadurai's suggested concept of ethnoscapes, describing the increasingly complicated and intersecting relationships in "the changing social, territorial, and cultural reproduction of group identity" (Appadurai 1991, p. 191) is useful. Cohen (1993) outlines the most significant reasons for a "dialogue between ethnomusicology and popular music studies" (p. 136) in stating:

> Individuals produce and consume music within specific social contexts (households, neighbourhoods, etc); at specific times or historical moments; within specific networks of social relationships (involving kin, peers, colleagues, etc.), relationships that have different dimensions (social, political, economic). People's experiences of music, the uses they have for it, and the meanings they construct around, or through it, are bound up with these specificities, and with the interconnections between them. This emphasises the importance of adopting a holistic perspective in the study of music and its role in people's lives, cultures and societies. Practices and discourses need to be examined across a range of intersecting contexts and networks (whether they involve music or not) in order to make sense of the meaning derived from music within one particular setting. (p. 135)

While this nexus of approaches is useful in describing current practice, a holistic perspective also requires a historical setting. In examining Hawaiian Hula song repertoire, Stillman (1995) argues that musical repertoire and social praxis must be linked as "relationships between hula song repertoire and the social actions underlying their composition and performance are

dialectical" (p. 2). Aspects of Stillman's observations in relation to Hula song repertoire are relevant to stringband in regard to the interconnectedness of stringband music, and therefore style, and the social and historical context of its production. Stringband music, as it will be shown throughout the social and musical analyses which follow, results in "a *mélange* of old and new songs and performance styles, many of which can be dated to specific performers and creators" (p. 11).

Webb (1997) provides an example of this in describing the music scene in Rabaul and its links with the musical repertoire of popular music in the area. This demonstrates the importance in considering notions of syncretism, acculturation and any of the complex of terms that have surfaced as scholars have grappled with musics that draw from a variety of sources.

The ways in which non-Western countries have incorporated the music of Western cultures in the development of contemporary indigenous styles has been a significant field of discussion in ethnomusicology. In attempting to define processes and explanations for a proliferation of musical practices that do not fit the relatively heterogeneous boundaries of traditional music and do not demonstrate total absorption of Western mass culture in the form of popular music, a number of terms (such as acculturation, transculturation and syncretism) have been suggested and debated as part of a wider scholarly discourse on the effect of the mass media in global and local contexts (see Kartomi 1981). Such attempts at definition are further complicated by notions of authenticity and inauthenticity in Pacific culture and the criticism of this as an approach (Linnekin 1992, Jolly 1992).

An ethnomusicological approach to acculturation reflects an attempt at categorising and explaining musical practices that seem removed from the original ethnomusicological projects of study, those of apparently neatly bounded communities engaging in apparently unadulterated traditional music practices. Even a cursory examination of popular music in the late 20th century, however, reveals a constant process of fragmentation and recombination as Middleton & Horn (1985, p. 2) point out in suggesting that

rock music "undoubtedly emerged from acculturative and synthesising processes but is now subject to competing assessments of the extent to which it represents change".

Stringband styles have been generated from a wide range of often common influences such as music broadcast on the radio and songs learnt by people living temporarily in different areas. There has, therefore, been a degree of mixing of songs, tunings, playing styles and languages between different cultural groups. This is interesting in that while local sub-styles have developed, common sources, influences and this sharing of ideas have provided for an interaction of musical styles across cultural boundaries. *Singsing tumbuna* (the Tok Pisin term for traditional music of largely pre-European contact origins) demonstrates a greater diversity of musical language and practice, and does not facilitate the crossing of cultural boundaries to the same degree that popular music does. The notion that popular music has a homogenising potential should be considered here. Philpott (1995) suggests:

> In the years leading up to Independence, and for perhaps the ensuing decade and a half, indigenous popular music in PNG, as happened in other Third World countries, was affected by a predominantly one-way flow of cultural products and the threat of a cultural 'grey-out'. As a consequence, PNG local popular music lost some of its authenticity and social relevance in the move to accommodate and mimic alien musical forces and forms. (p. 111)

In discussing early power band music, this is cogent in that bands tended to copy overseas songs. However, as new songs were composed and local styles appeared, social relevance was regained and the music scene diversified rather than experiencing a 'grey-out'.

Hayward (1995) also posits that "PNG culture continues to show signs of diversity, development and accomplishment both in the face of, and - more significantly - *through* the agencies of its 'modernisation' "(p. 2, italics

original). This applies as much to the development of stringband music and its use of guitars, mass media and new performance contexts as it does to music since the emergence of the local cassette recording industry. This process may be seen as the musical construction of identity during a period of rapid social and technological change. Frith (1996) in examining music and identity relates the idea of identity as a process rather than an end in itself. Music is involved in the construction of this ongoing process as opposed to merely expressing or representing identity. He states:

> the question we should be asking is not what does popular music reveal about the people who play and use it but how does it create them as a people, as a web of identities? (p. 121)

Webb (1995) approaches this point with stringband music in Northeastern New Britain with:

> the invention of string band, the major new postwar musical style was crucial to the process of individual and group self-reinvention, and so represented a shift in individual and collective understandings of self. (p. 232)

Webb and Niles, separately, have posited the notion that popular music represents a good example of a "developing national, public culture" (Webb 1993, p. xix). Niles, cited in Webb (1993), suggests:

> This music can be considered somewhat "neutral" in that the musical style derives from non-Papua New Guinean sources and is therefore more distant from the very strong regional associations of traditional musics. Consequently, although numerous regional styles have developed in this music as well, it could be argued that *lokal musik* can, and should, be an essential component in constructing a national identity. (p. xv)

This consideration of identity as a fluid concept dependent on perspective and individual and group relationships links with the multi-layered nature of identity construction in music. Identity manifests itself through clothes, context, ritual, location and other aspects other than just musical style (Hebdige 1979). Webb (1993) explores the various facets of these layers with stringband music, and discusses a range of contributing factors including use of language, performance events, cassette cover design and presentation in the mass media. This thesis focuses on musical style within this complex of relationships, more specifically those aspects of guitar style which go towards defining regional styles, as defined according to provincial, village group, and even individual player criteria.

Working from the definition of musical genre as posited by Fabbri (1982, p. 136), "a set of musical events, real or possible, whose course is regulated by a definite arrangement of socially accepted rules", stringband music represents a genre of PNG music. This is evident both through the ensemble that the term denotes, and the social functions and musical styles the term connotes. In asking the question "Which elements of music sound characterise a regional style?" and in positing some important features of the Tolai stringband style, Webb (1993, p. 6) isolates elements such as rhythm, vocal style, timbre, melodic contour, guitar technique as significant considerations in attempting to define aspects of style within the genre. He also points out that an analysis of these elements leads to issues of "generational discriminations" (Webb 1993, p. 6) which are significant to the direction of this study.

While approaches to the analysis of popular music such as Brackett (1995) offer some useful techniques that explore the different needs of popular music in relation to Western art music, their wholesale adoption to non-Western popular musics can be problematic due to the different contexts in which they operate. At the same time, more traditional approaches to music and ethnography developed in the ethnomusicology field are also not completely

adequate for musics that have diverse influences, are spread across many different culture groups, and whose interaction with the mass media is significant. This therefore necessitates a combination of analytical and theoretical tools.

The hybrid approach towards the theoretical perspective I pursue can be divided into those areas that relate to tools of musical analysis, and those that relate to concepts of social analysis. Both of these areas are influenced by Stillman's approach to the study of musical repertoire that involves both musical and social analysis. The musical analysis takes a fairly traditional approach; that is, it involves Western music notation, a combination of classical functional and popular music harmonic vocabularies, with the addition of two forms of tablature to map the more kinetic features of guitar playing. The social analysis tools used in my analysis focus on two main areas, the first being that part of cultural construction that admits and celebrates the dynamic interplay between music, its function in society and the relative identities of those involved. The second area is the opening up of geographical boundaries in ethnographic analysis that Appadurai (1991) presents, so that the changing, fluid relationships between musicians, their audience, and the means by which the music is distributed through mass-media can be better described and understood.

1.5 Research design and methodology

The variety of stringband styles and their widespread distribution means that data collection was a primary consideration in initial research design. Numerous commercial recordings of stringband have been made, particularly by Pacific Gold Studios, and in the process of this research I collected about sixty commercial stringband cassettes. While these were useful in formulating ideas about regional style (comparing all bands from West New Britain for example) there were limitations for analysis in that it was difficult to separate instrumental parts for transcription, and information about tuning

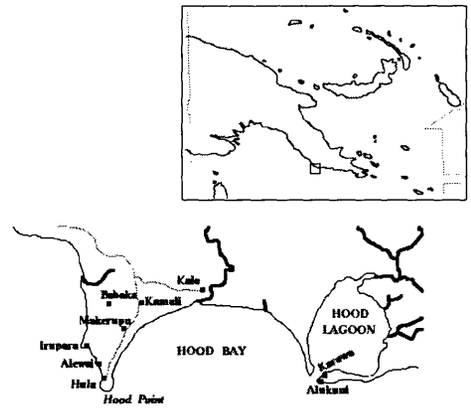


Figure 1.2: Map of the Hood Lagoon area

and specifics of guitar technique could only be inferred. For this reason the decision was made to carry out fieldwork in areas where I could actually view the musicians, record them, and also sit down and spend time discussing and playing with the musicians themselves.

The areas chosen for study were those which had recognisable styles that formed part of the commonly described style statements made by Papua New Guineans and other commentators, that also had active string bands and were geographically separate.

The two main areas in which fieldwork was carried out are the Hood Lagoon region of the Central Province, focusing on Babaka and nearby villages (see figure 1.2); and the region to the north of Madang town (see figures 1.3 and 1.4). Music from East New Britain is examined, with the important difference that the recordings and discussions were held in Port Moresby. For contrast and comparison, I also briefly examine some examples recorded in the Duke of York islands to the north of East New Britain. Nearby family contacts[6] (in neighbouring village Irupara) were used for the research in Hood Lagoon, and music students at the University of Papua New Guinea in

[6]My wife is from Irupara village, which is a twenty minute walk from Babaka, and is related to people from Babaka on her father's side of the family.

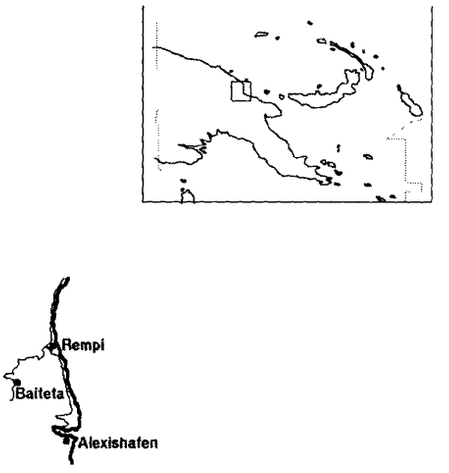


Figure 1.3: Map of the north Madang area: Rempi and Baiteta villages

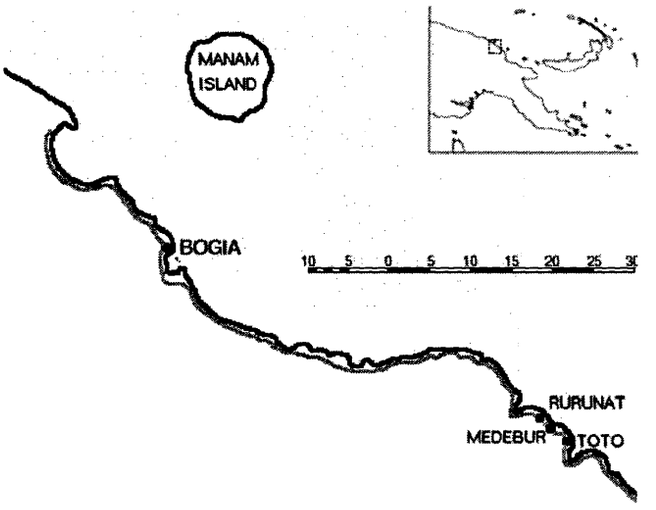


Figure 1.4: Map of the north Madang area: Rurunat village and surrounds

the case of the Madang area. The need to cover a reasonable span of bands in each area meant that these links were extremely important in facilitating contact, securing the trust of musicians and villagers, and assisting in maintaining further contact for translation, returning of tapes and documentation. Villages rather than towns have been chosen since that is where the regional styles are most evident and where stringbands are most easily still found.

I spent as much time talking to musicians and villagers about stringband music as I did recording and playing with the musicians. This was in an attempt to get a better idea of how stringband has developed, how it forms part of village life, as well as learning about specific local guitar styles. The decision to learn as much about stringband by playing with bands and individual musicians in informal sessions is based on a central tenet of ethnomusicology; that valuable data may be collected through participant observation in the process of music-making activities. This method has provided me with practical knowledge about the nature of PNG guitar style and technique. Certain information would simply not have come to light without my having had to physically learn and perform the music. This includes aspects of the nomenclature, and technique such as right hand picking, which can be difficult to transcribe from a recording alone without an understanding of the finger movement.

Participation reveals many things to the researcher and I have found Charles Keil's notion of participatory discrepancies (Keil 1994) useful in attempting to extract important details of performance and style that are not evident from recordings and notated transcriptions alone. In this case, one might more accurately state that it has been 'clumsy' participatory discrepancies that have revealed most in the first instance of this research. Making mistakes, being corrected, and eventually being able to perform with some degree of stylistic acceptance by the musicians themselves is an experience that opens up ideas at the level of performance process.

Analysis of musical examples using Western music notation is central to

explicating aspects of style that stem from guitar technique and tuning in this study. While there are legitimate concerns regarding the use of such notation in relation to non-Western popular music such as stringband, I consider it to be the best option in this case for two main reasons. Firstly, the influence of diatonic harmony is clear in stringband music; the guitar parts are based on a diatonic harmonic structure with clearly defined key centres. Secondly, those aspects of musical style which Western music notation is least capable of expressing, such as timbre and subtle differences in dynamic accent, are not of primary analytical priority in the first instance. Where necessary, a descriptive approach will be taken to deal with these issues.

Stringband music exhibits a considerable degree of consistency in instrumental texture, key centre and technique throughout the repertoires of particular bands. The analysis in this thesis relies partly on this feature of consistency in that a subset of songs from all of those heard and recorded has been selected for detailed study. Other comparisons based on less detailed observations are then made for songs by the same band as well as those from other regions in suggesting wider conclusions or possibilities. As the central focus is on demonstrating some aspects of distinctly regional styles, this detailed approach, though narrower in corpus size, has been chosen.

That similarities have been observed between bands of close geographical proximity has led to the description of stringband in terms of regional criteria. The basic premise behind the analysis is that there is a set of common instrumental riffs and phrases that are constantly reiterated throughout the song repertoires of particular bands that contribute significantly to notions of instrumental style. Though these are modified and developed, the basic underlying harmonic, melodic and rhythmic features are retained. There are also a number of techniques related to such riffs and phrases that are employed by players in stringband ensembles that provide cues for chord changes in coordinating performances of this music. In stringband music each instrument has a fairly clearly defined function in that one guitar plays

lead throughout a song, another plays only rhythm and so on. There is virtually no functional cross-over (as compared with a guitar player in a band swapping between rhythm and lead playing as common in Western popular music). Relationships between guitars, ukuleles and bass instruments (where relevant) utilising these features combine to create particular musical textures that form part of the differentiations made between regionally described styles.

Social praxis, context and historical data was obtained through interviews, informal group discussions, observation and published work on the areas under study. Although most of this data was collected at the same time as the field recordings, it has been separated into two chapters here to clearly differentiate the musicological analysis from the social analysis. The complexity and variation in both quantity and nature of the information in relation to the different areas suggested that this approach to structure would present the ideas most clearly.

The next chapter investigates the historical and social development of stringband music, drawing on relevant historical literature and sources of information from the field. It is chronologically structured and provides a background for the detailed analyses that then follow in chapter three. The analyses are divided into different areas which, in two cases, correspond with the use of particular tunings. Material gleaned from the fieldwork period that consisted of attempts at reconstructing older styles is then tackled separately, and informs notions of *ki* and style. The fourth chapter then examines changes in the stringband scene since the growth of the commercial cassette recording industry. Its comparisons and conclusions are most obviously related to the material covered in chapter two, although there are important observations regarding style that stem from considering both chapters two and three. The final chapter attempts to draw this material together in conclusion.

Chapter 2

Historical development

The main aims of this chapter are to provide a historical background to the development of stringband music in PNG, and to explain the social context in which it has developed. The discussion is organised chronologically into a number of headings that essentially follow historical periods described by Webb & Niles (1987). Under each category a brief general historical overview is followed by an overview of musical development. This is then focused into a discussion of popular music centred on stringband, using material from related literature and from my fieldwork as examples. These include oral accounts from taped interviews recorded during the fieldwork period and material taken from fieldnotes. Important issues that result from the discussion in each period are then explained.

2.1 Pre-European contact

The history of peoples who have lived in what is now PNG before European contact is too large a subject to tackle in detail here. The complexities of attempting to describe inter-cultural relationships amongst groups who have been in the area for thousands of years, and those waves of settlers such as Polynesians who have settled the area are too intricate for the purposes of this study. However, two essential points are of significance. Firstly, indigenous culture was largely uninfluenced by European culture before the mid to end of the nineteenth century. This is important because stringband music has been influenced by European culture, and this impacts on the extent of musical change. Secondly, evidence for inter-cultural contact makes it almost certain that the cultures of this time were, at various times and in different degrees, undergoing change.

While this may seem obvious, I believe it is very important in relation to the way we think about indigenous traditions, the Western impact on them, and how indigenous people today view, construct and use those traditions in contemporary society. Particularly amongst university music students I have noticed a strong perception between popular music being associated with

change, and traditional music being associated with lack of change, or at least a great deal more resilience and resistance to it. As a result, the notion of stringband music as a tradition in itself can easily be underplayed. These issues are developed in this chapter and again in chapter four, where stringband groups can be seen to be used as a means of constructing indigenous local identity, drawing on older traditional music and dance practices.

Examples of inter-cultural contact in pre-European times are perhaps best illustrated by well-documented examples of the existence of trading cycles (Allen 1982, Malinowski 1961 [1922], Harding 1967). McLean (1994) examines this as part of his study on the distribution of instruments (excluding the ukulele and guitar) in PNG. He suggests a dynamic movement of instruments between different cultures, and points to the existence of traditional musics containing nonsense syllables (and oral evidence from the areas themselves) as evidence of trading in musical material. Although the idea of an unbroken, pure musical tradition passed down through many generations has been shown to be somewhat inaccurate (McLean 1994, pp. 62-70), (Niles 1994, p. 84), it is reasonable to conclude that music in this period was least influenced by non-Melanesian sources, and that it was less subject to rapid change.

2.2 Early European contact

As suggested previously, the notion of some continuity in musical change must be qualified with an understanding of rates of change. There is little doubt that the events of sustained European contact that occurred in the late nineteenth century as missionaries and traders settled in the area instigated cultural changes of previously unsurpassed magnitude and rapidity.

Successive waves of European missionaries, traders, miners, and Government officials travelled to PNG from the late nineteenth century onwards. They were accompanied by Chinese, Micronesians, Polynesians, Malays, and

others.[1] A combination of conversion to Christianity, the imposition of Government laws and the exploitation of labour and resources fuelled considerable social change. The extent of this change varied, with coastal and river communities generally experiencing earlier contact than those further inland. Contact between Europeans and Papua New Guineans tended to be divided along colonial master-servant or missionary-convert lines of power. As a result direct musical influence seems to have been isolated and intense in some cases (such as the introduction and maintenance of a military band) or more widespread and indirect through observation, imitation and limited participation in European music activity.

Perhaps the most significant musical influence from this period was that of Christian worship as introduced by missionaries, most of whom were Europeans. Polynesians with the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the Papuan region were a notable exception. The introduction of hymn singing led to a number of prominent music types that were developed prior to the Second World War, such as *kwaia* (Tok Pisin for choir) (see Webb 1993, pp. 102-3, for a summary of suggested PNG text and music types). These exist in a number of forms bearing varying degrees of incorporation of specifically indigenous elements (see Niles in Zahn 1996, pp. xvii-xciii). The Hood Lagoon area of the Central Province represents a useful example in that the missionary activity was quite early and involved some major musical changes that have lasted, indeed prospered until today.

There was a LMS centre in Keapara, a village near Hula, from 1887 (Oram 1968*b*) and missionary teachers stationed in nearby villages such as Hula spread their activities to neighbouring villages. The LMS approach to musical culture was to replace existing musical practices with those acceptable to the mission. Oram (1968*b*, p. 11) cites an example where "A pastor

[1]See Dutton (1985) for a detailed examination of people who travelled to the Papuan region, an analysis of the use and scope of indigenous labour, and brief histories of the lives of a range of settlers. See Webb (1997) for a discussion of the diversity of people in Rabaul, and the part they played in the musical scene there.

forcibly entered homes at Kalo and removed drums, hatchets and other articles because the people had beaten drums loudly on Sunday night". Oram also describes coastal villages as converting more readily and rapidly than nearby inland agricultural villages. He posits this as most likely due to the more integral part of feasting, spirits and existing religious beliefs revolving around the production of food in the inland villages (Oram 1968*b*, p. 3). In areas such as Hula where mission influence was strong, practices such as the shaving of married women's heads and initiation ceremonies were stopped. The church became an integral part of society in the area, extending into feasting, marriage, death and legal ceremonies. A system of church deacons drawn from principal clan leaders further strengthened the church in village life. Oram also describes pre-European contact songs from Hula such as *kelekele* and *one* as being replaced by the south Seas missionaries and traders with their *ute* (secular vocal) and *peroveta* (sacred vocal) songs (Oram 1968*b*, p. 10). In the Hula area, knowledge of pre-European contact songs is virtually nonexistent. When questioned about traditional music in the area, people I spoke to tended to refer to *ute* and *peroveta.* Quite clearly, then, these are good examples of musical practices that are regarded as traditional, but are in fact locally modified and developed forms of introduced musics.[2] Villagers I have spoken to refer to missionaries as introducing these new musical forms but do not refer to traders. It is becoming harder to find information about music before European contact as people whose parents lived in the late 19th century have mostly died. The situation is not assisted by the fact that many people have been indoctrinated with the idea of the pre-Christianity time as darkness, and subsequent conversion as the light (Oram 1968*b*, p. 10). This imagery is quite strong, and I have often sensed people's shame at discussing the lifestyles and cultural practices of their ancestors.

The influence of European secular musics was largely linked to European population centres and activities such as towns and plantations. During the first half of the twentieth century, indigenous labour grew and diversified

[2]See Goldsworthy (1995, p. 31) for a parallel in this notion of tradition in relation to Fijian Christian song.

(Dutton 1985). This provided people with the opportunity to witness, and possibly even participate in, the musical life of the colonial settlers, with musical genres and instruments popular at the time. As the European, Chinese, Micronesian and other outsider populations grew, musical activity in towns increased, and became more visible to the indigenous population.

Webb (1997) discusses the music scene in and around Rabaul since colonial control commenced in 1875. He describes how a broad mix of musical styles have been significant influences in the genesis and development of the indigenous popular music scene. While other areas have experienced different rates of change and levels of musical experience, many of the issues he raises, and processes he describes are relevant for other parts of PNG. One of the most important discoveries in this work is that of the under-written history of the Pacific region as it relates to non-European communities in Rabaul. Chinese, Malay and Ambonese people, for example, have lived in PNG for as long as Europeans, though they tend to be marginalized in the writing of colonial histories. It becomes clear that an understanding of this scene and its diversity is essential to understanding later developments in PNG music. The importance of this period for stringband music lies in setting conditions from which later popular music genres would develop, as "a meaningful indigenous popular culture is not something that materialises instantly, neither is it necessarily ephemeral" (Webb 1997, p. 53).

2.3 The Second World War

The Second World War was a major point of upheaval in PNG. The massive influx of troops and equipment from both Allied and Japanese forces directly impacted on the lives of Papua New Guineans.

Carriers and policemen were recruited by ANGAU (the Australian military administrative organisation set up during the war) to serve the various military activities going on throughout the Papuan region. Other forms of

contact, though less direct, were also important. There was a US base between Makerupu and Hula, for example, and though the surrounding villages were officially off-limits to military personnel, there was a hospital in Hula and some contact between villagers and servicemen was inevitable. This represented a change in perspective for locals in that relationships with servicemen (particularly Americans) and locals was more cordial than with other outsiders. Previous relationships with Europeans were based on strictly controlled and enforced relationships determined, and to an extent legally regulated by, the politics of colonialism.

An account by David Kini of Kalo village (Laeka 1975) demonstrates the change in the nature of outside contact which is significant in considering the musical influences that were adopted in the years following the war.

> On the question of how the Papuans were treated by the foreigners during the war, David says that the Americans were very friendly with them. They sat and ate together with them, and anything the people did for them, like fetching water, they would be paid for their work. Whereas the Australians were not so friendly as the Americans. When they saw them sitting or eating together with the Americans, they were furious and insulted them. (p. 76)

Relationships with servicemen were significant in that their contacts were closer than those Papua New Guineans had experienced with other people from outside the country. Rather than just hearing music of the colonial 'masters' local people and servicemen engaged in musical and other activities for entertainment together. Though it is difficult to assess the influence of these relationships on specific areas it seems reasonable to conclude that the wartime experience provided a new perspective from which local people could view the various relationships they had experienced under colonialism.

Read (1947), in examining the effect of the war on people in the Markham Valley region of the Morobe Province provides further support in this vein.

Although focusing on local stereotypical perceptions of English and Australian people[3], he points out their exposure to Americans and African-Americans. Although not fully exploring local reaction to these "additional groups" (p. 107) it seems reasonable to surmise, based on the detailed local view of other Europeans, that the mere realisation that new overseas groups of people acted differently towards them was important in terms of developing ideas for their own future relationships with future visitors and settlers from overseas.

There is little doubt that people in the area were exposed to a variety of musics that were an essential part of the cultural baggage of the servicemen. Japanese songs are still known in many parts of New Guinea for example (see, for example, Niles 1980, pp. 175-9). An early overview of introduced music forms in PNG is provided by Sheridan (1972). The influence of The Second World War is described as:

> American music of white and negro soldiers made no impression. What the people enjoyed were the guitars from Hawaii or the Philippines. Servicemen of these areas taught the people chord-and-rhythm styles of playing. (p. 819)

In examining the effects of the Second World War in the South Pacific, Lindstrom & White (1990) include a chapter on music, focusing on the contact between servicemen and locals. The impact of this contact and the spread of instruments is described as influencing local musical practices:

> The convulsions of battle troop concentrations, population movements, and new musical technologies shook up once insular musical traditions. Instruments such as the harmonica, guitar, ukulele, and electric organ became more widely used. (p. 157)

[3]Read (1947) points out that this differentiation seems to have more to do with groups who had been in PNG before the war - referred to as English, despite their actual nationality - and those who had come during the war - Australian soldiers.

The large numbers of mainly US and Japanese military personnel generated, and were supported by a comprehensive formal and informal recording and performance network. This support included cinema, plays, and shows, and a formidable influx of performance technology such as gramophones, projectors and radio transmitters and receivers. Perhaps the most obvious influence that remains today, though as yet unproved from oral accounts, are the similarities in the boogie-woogie bass that is a feature of much bamboo bass playing in PNG. Performers utilising this bass style in the Swing era, such as Louis Jordan, had recordings widely broadcast throughout the Pacific regions where US personnel were based.

In summary, even though it affected different areas of PNG to different extents, the war provided Papua New Guineans with a fresh perspective on possibilities for the future. The incredible movements of troops with what must have seemed like impossible quantities and types of 'cargo', along with the realisation that pre-war relationships with Europeans were by no means the only ones possible, highlights the period as a critical historical juncture, even catalyst, from which to view the development of post-war popular music.

2.4 After the war

Griffin, Nelson & Firth (1979) summarise some of the post-war changes in perceptions of social structure in PNG as follows:

> The war changed the scale of foreign intervention. During the war foreigners had come in vastly greater numbers than ever before, and in the post-war they employed people, wealth and technology to an extent inconceivable to those Papua New Guineans who had worked with pre-war administrations. While some of the foreigners in the 1950s behaved as though they possessed the advantage of being judged 'superior beings', and some Papua New Guineans believed that they were, there could be no complete return to *masta-boi* relationships. Too many Papua New Guineans had

> known other sorts of relationships and they had seen foreigners in situations where they were clearly not superior... (p. 99)

With a greater focus from Australia on the development of basic infrastructure, PNG grew in ways vital to the emergent popular music scene.[4] Indigenous people played a more participative role in the growing cash economy and opportunities for travel and labour widened personal perspectives and allowed a more dynamic interplay and spread of shared cultural resources that extended previously confined boundaries of interaction. Prominent among these were guitars, guitar songs and opportunities for performance that would develop into stringband music with distinctive styles and unique local perfomance contexts.

Guitars spread more widely throughout the country following the war, and guitar and ukulele accompanied songs were imitated, composed and performed (Webb & Niles 1987, Sheridan 1972). I will now examine the spread of guitars, ukuleles, and the development of stringband music in the Hood Lagoon area, drawing on discussions with locals during my fieldwork in the area. A local view on the development of guitar song and then stringbands and stringband music was provided by an interview with villagers in Babaka in December 1996. The village elders I spoke to described the introduction of ukuleles and guitars to the village.

> In 1952 and 1953 we were living in the village and a man called Koneva Monse came to the village. We were small children at this time when this music was taught and these skills came to the village. At this time there was no road. There were only canoes and not many motor boats. Koneva Monse lived at Korobosea/ 2 mile (in Port Moresby) at this time and he met one of our villagers who had leprosy at Kemo hospital. This villager bought Koneva to the village in 1952 or 1953. At this time we started to

[4]See Waiko (1993) and Griffin et al. (1979) for overviews of the changes in Australia's colonial administration and attitude in the post-war period. See Webb (1995, pp. 274-7) for a discussion of the early post-war period and the emergence of stringband music.

> make round ukuleles with wood from the bush and a round tinned meat can. There were no ukuleles at that time so we made them ourselves like this. Two men from here already knew how to play the ukulele, Kila Loia (shot dead by a Cook Islands man in Irupara) and Renagi Galewa. Those two men showed the rest of us how to play. (Interview with Babaka villagers December 18, 1996. Translated by Gere Rupa)

From this discussion it appears that there were more ukuleles than guitars in the village, partly because they could be locally made relatively easily with coconut shells and available timber. Guitars became more numerous in the village during the 1960s, no doubt as a result of the increase in employment amongst Papua New Guineans in the area and their increased financial power in the growing indigenous cash economy. While guitars are far more available today, they are still most likely to be bought by people in town who are employed and then brought to the village. A villager dependent on gardening, fishing and relatives for survival is unlikely to easily have the cash available for a guitar, and this would have been more of an issue in the 1960s and 1970s, with a less developed cash economy than in comparison to today. As songs composed for ukulele and guitar accompaniment became more popular, these ensembles became part of various intra- and inter-village events such as weddings, celebrations for new buildings or roads, and annual events such as Christmas and New Year. An account of the formation and activities of a band in the neighbouring village of Irupara illustrates the nature of these performance contexts.

In 1962, Irupara resident Kila Gulukune Kalo gathered ten other villagers (nine women and one man) together to form a band called the Young Papos. 'Papo' means 'knows nothing' and indicated the band's perceived lack of musical experience. They were one of many bands from villages such as Babaka, Makerupu, Hula, and Kaparoko in the area. The main performances occurred for social functions and gatherings (a soccer match or wedding for example), when the band would walk to the village holding the function and

perform, often in competition with other bands. Kalo recalled that all villages would have a band or bands that performed as well, or the process would be reciprocated when a function was held in his home village of Irupara. The Young Papos gained considerable popularity with their strong combination of female and male voices, guitars and ukuleles. Kalo left the village from 1965 to 1970 and when he returned, family commitments by members of the band stopped its reformation. Some of the songs have continued to be performed and are well known throughout the village.

Stringbands often developed out of village youth clubs. Leslie Rupa, from Irupara, in a discussion with me in January 1997 described such a club in the mid-1960s, when a number of bands were active in the village. Regular meetings were held where bands would rehearse and prepare for planned performances in the area. Rupa described the importance attributed to band dress standards where members would wear matching shirts and ties.[5] These developments in musical ensemble and style were not always immediately and openly welcomed however. A member of the audience at the 1997 Ivilikou Conference and PNG Music Festival recounted his early experiences as a stringband musician in the mid-1960s. He described the older generation tended to be involved more in the practice of traditional musical styles and regarded the new young musicians with their guitars and new styles and performance functions as representative of a perhaps rebellious, or at least different generation of musicians.

Similar processes of development and influence were active throughout the area. A group of relatives from Paramana village, on the Aroma coast further south east from Hula, formed a band called The Paramana Strangers in 1967. They recorded a number of albums and became quite famous throughout PNG and the Pacific through their tours and recordings. Singer Kiki Geno in an interview in Paramana village in 1995 spoke of the importance of radio and live bands that were heard on occasional visits to Port Moresby in their formative period. The Paramana Strangers copied songs and imitated guitar

[5]See Webb (1998, pp. 152-3) for a discussion of similar groups in the Central Province.

accompaniment by strumming discarded tin fish cans. Original songs in their language were then composed and instrumental proficiency was achieved.

Interestingly, stringband music is still quite popular and performed regularly in Babaka and Paramana, the home villages of two of the most popular stringbands from the Central Province in the history of popular music in PNG, the BB Kings and Paramana Strangers respectively. In many neighbouring villages, stringband has all but ceased as a part of formal village events, though bands do perform occasionally, most often in informal family gatherings. These issues will be discussed when the current stringband scene is considered in chapter four.

Several types of performance event developed with stringbands in urban and village contexts. The most common are dance events called *pati* (Tok Pisin for party) and six-to-six dances. An event known as *kap-ti singsing* (Tok Pisin for cup of tea dance) is described by Sheridan (1972, p. 819), though no one I have spoken to over a seven year period recalls them, or the term, indicating that these could possibly have been isolated to a particular part of the country, or were called different things in different places.

Pati usually consisted of dances in an enclosed area with one or more stringbands performing. Admission fees were usually charged and refreshments made available. Six-to-six dances were similar and the term refers to the approximate times at which such events would start and finish - 6:00pm to 6:00am - or more generally sunset to sunrise. The expression Tok Pisin expression *'pilai i go tulait'* (play until it becomes light) is very common in relation to stringband performance, both in organised and informal events, and refers to playing all night until the sun rises.

Stringband music also accompanied other village events such as weddings, Christmas and New Year celebrations. Some traditional rituals and events have incorporated stringband performances in or around them. Anthropologist Michael Goddard, who carried out field work in the Western Highlands in the early 1980s described to me the incorporation of stringband music into a *singsing* in the village he lived in. Old men taking a break from performing

traditional dancing and singing in the men's house would move to the opposite end to watch a stringband performing. He described the same process as occurring in reverse when the stringband rested. At times both groups would be performing simultaneously.[6]

The growth in popularity of stringband music led to stringband competitions called *resis* (Tok Pisin for races or competition), where a number of stringbands perform to an audience and a group of judges who award prizes. *Resis* were at their most popular in the late 1960s and 1970s, and were often organised as events in themselves, rather than just at cultural shows which is more the case today. These cultural shows usually consist of a performance arena for traditional dance groups, a stage for power bands, and an area for commercial displays. Based on Australian rural shows and instigated and supported by the Australian administration in the 1950s and 1960s, they have become an important part of cultural production in PNG, with a considerable degree of kudos associated with participation (by both traditional and popular music groups) and results in their competitive sections. The desire of bands to succeed at such competitions has had a significant impact on the development of stringband music, with groups practising for months in advance, hiding songs from public performance and carrying out rituals of isolation and magic to ensure the best possible results.

In an interview in January 1997, Jeff Sawai, active in the stringband scene around Rurunat village north of Madang since the 1960s, described the mid-1960s as being the height of the stringband *pati* and *resis* era. He cited the example of a wedding party in neighbouring Toto village during this period where a band from Rurunat performed with other local bands until dawn. He recounted that stringband *resis* were regularly held from Ulingan to Malala, and that bands from the region mainly performed within these boundaries, only occasionally travelling to larger centres such as Madang or Bogia.

Employment, transport, and the growth of urban centres were important vehicles for the sharing of musical ideas and the transmission of musical

[6]Personal communication, February 1998.

skills and knowledge in guitar playing and singing. It was perhaps the first time that this was done on a widespread basis by Papua New Guineans themselves, as opposed to being coerced into different musical practices by missionaries. Joseph Madako from Bomase village in Madang recalled learning some Milne Bay guitar styles from a colleague from the Central Province while they were both working in the Southern Highlands as teachers.[7] His knowledge and experience of music from beyond the Madang area enhanced his local musical standing when he returned to his village. Another example of employment and the spread of popular music is provided by the earliest commercial stringband recording, which features two Rabaul musicians who were in Chimbu Province as labourers on a plantation (Webb & Niles 1987, p. 56). Examples of this sort of musical contact are found in more recent times. The Simoka stringband who released a recording with Pacific Gold Studios in 1991 (PAC 556) consists of members from Sepik, Morobe and Kainantu who worked together on a plantation near Rabaul. The name of the band is derived from the first two letters of the names of the areas they are from. The story related by Babaka villagers about the start of guitar and ukulele music in the village (see page 38) is another that demonstrates similar processes of temporary removal from the village providing opportunities for new musical experiences, though the context is not employment. People travelling and returning with new musical experiences and skills was supplemented by music brought to a growing range of areas, via radio broadcasts, and the following section discusses its importance.

Mackay (1976), in a comprehensive account of broadcasting in PNG opens his chapter on the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) with:

> How do you plan a broadcasting service for a country that includes part of the largest non-continental island in the world, a screen of some six hundred islands and archipelagos including the northern Solomon Islands in a total area of some 910 000 square miles? How do you plan a broadcasting service for some 1 500 000

[7]Personal communication, January 1997.

> Melanesians wo communicate in more than 700 languages and dialects, one-sixth of the world's languages... (p. 10)

He then points out that it was a matter of evolution rather than planning that resulted in the success of radio in broadcasting news, educational material, and of course music in PNG. Despite a somewhat expatriate focused programming policy for the first decade or so, the ABC station 9PA evolved into a network that featured numerous regional stations broadcasting in numerous languages. Government broadcasting stations were set up later, starting with a station in Rabaul in 1962. These served areas that were not reached by the ABC and served more political and development goals as Mackay (1976) points out:

> The stations were instruments of government... The stations were propaganda vehicles for economic, political and social ideas based on development, not to keep a party in power. Party politics really did not emerge until just before independence in 1973, and prior to that 'the government' was really the Papua New Guinea administration answerable to the Australian federal government. (p. 43)

Local music was broadcast "related to the expressed desires of village people and their degree of sophistication" (Mackay 1976, p. 49-50). Patrols regularly travelled to rural areas recording both traditional and local popular music. Joseph Madako, a musician from Bomase village in Madang Province, related to me the thrill of firstly having such a patrol come to the village to record stringband, followed by an even greater one when their music was heard over the radio, with numerous villagers clustered around one of the few radios they had access to at the time.[8] Western popular music was also broadcast, and country and western (or 'cowboy' music as I have often heard older Papua New Guineans refer to it) was common. Artists such as Jim Reeves, Hank Williams, even the Australian Slim Dusty in later years

[8]Interview with Joseph Madako, Bomase village, January 1997.

were well known and admired. There is little doubt then, that radio played an important part in not only providing access to overseas styles, but also assisted in nurturing the development of local stringband style.

While not specifically related to developments in guitar style in relation to stringband music, the following material gleaned during discussions in Madang where bamboo tubes are commonly and widely used as an instrument in stringbands is useful in providing a perspective on the nature of innovation, both in terms of the development of a new[9] instrument, and changes in style as a result. The instrument consists of a number of tuned lengths of fairly thick bamboo laid horizontally on the ground and struck with a pair of thongs to obtain a percussive, pitched bass sound. Two closely matching accounts are given below to illustrate processes of change involved in the introduction of new ideas to the stringband scene in a particular area.

A stringband musician from Baiteta village (north of Madang town), who had performed in groups in the 1960s and early 1970s, Alvis Grumar, described the playing of bamboo as having originated in the Solomon Islands. He stated the style was then brought to Madang by two musicians from Siar Island, Aksim[10] and Wesley Dag, who had travelled to the Solomon Islands for employment and education respectively. Starting on Siar Island, a stringband style associated with the use of bamboo subsequently spread to other areas.

A musician active in the neighbouring village of Bomase in the village group known as Rempi (about 25km north of Madang on the coast), Joseph Madako, related a similar story regarding the early introduction of bamboo style into the Madang area. He also stated that during the 1960s and early 1970s bands in Madang used only guitars and ukuleles. Madako pinpointed Dag and Aksim as the two men who introduced bamboo bands to Madang, and stated that the first bands to use these were based in Siar village and Kranket village. Later, other groups adopted the style and modified it for

[9]Bamboo stamping tubes are a traditional instrument in the area, although the means of playing and tuning them is quite different, hence the use of 'new' here.

[10]Grumar could not recall Aksim's other name.

their own use. He stated that permission to use the bamboo instruments was sought from the original Siar innovators at first, but after a while groups from all over the province adopted bamboo without seeking permission and it became widespread. Madako further stated that bamboo was used by some groups prior to this innovation as stamping tubes, but commented that the pitch was the same throughout, and the bamboo did not match the guitar chords, indicating a primarily rhythmic function. The use of a number of tubes tuned to three or four primary chords allowed a better harmonic fit between the guitar and bamboo, and it took on a significant function in the bass region of the musical texture. Pawpaw trees have also been used as a replacement for bamboo by bands in the Madang area; Madako recalling the mess left behind in Siar village after a stringband competition, and the resultant lack of pawpaw trees in local gardens as they had been cut to provide musical instruments.

2.5 Power band music

The development of stringband music in PNG ran roughly in parallel with the emergence and development of the rock scene in Western nations, and, although some rock music inevitably made its way to the ears of Papua New Guineans, country and western, and guitar based musics from other Pacific nations were the main influences on early stringband music.

Access to electric instruments and hence power band music was difficult for Papua New Guineans so the scene developed gradually from the early 1960s. Instruments and amplification equipment were out of the reach of virtually all local people, and performance venues with electrical power practically inaccessible. The last of these obstacles was overcome in 1962 when indigenous Papua New Guineans were given the legal right to drink alcohol in taverns and bars. The first power bands consisted largely of expatriates and 'mixed race'[11] members. The most likely explanation for this was financial

[11]The term mixed race is commonly used in Papua New Guinea and apparently carries

as well as social; although the law allowed all Papua New Guineans to drink, social attitudes and an unwritten virtual apartheid existed for many years with the mixed race community regarded as more acceptable drinking (and perhaps musical) companions. This gradually subsided, though remnants of these attitudes have continued right through to the late 1990s in isolated pockets of insular, generally Australian male drinking clubs.

The power band scene increased in activity leading up to the optimistic and energetic pre-independence period in the early 1970s. The first local recording studio started in 1976 and has grown considerably in size since then.[12] Throughout the development of the power band scene stringband continued, even thrived, though by the 1980s was definitely losing its prestige among young people as a dynamic, relevant form of popular cultural expression. The demise of stringband music, a degree of stylistic incorporation in power band contexts and the resulting cross-genre relationships will be examined in chapter four.

2.6 Summary

The material presented so far has not investigated the development of distinctive regional styles. This will be tackled in the next chapter, after analyses of guitar parts provide an adequate framework for discussion. What this chapter has attempted to present however, is an overview of the prevailing view that exists of how stringband has developed, and its social context through that history. Specific examples cited so far have tended to support the idea of the spread of guitars and ukuleles to villages from towns after the war. In the 1950s and 1960s guitars became more available due to the increase in labour, greater availability of cash, the development of a better road system, and easier access to trade stores. In the 1960s numerous stringbands composing songs in the vernacular were active. As songs were composed locally

no derogatory or pejorative connotations.

[12] see Philpott (1995) for a more detailed view of developments in the commercial popular music industry in PNG.

and their popularity increased, stringbands became tightly integrated into the socio-musical life of villages. This is indicated by the active *pati* and *resis* scene that emerged, and is further supported by the use of practices more generally associated with traditional music (*singsing tumbuna*) such as the use of body decoration, magic, and rehearsal and performance rituals.

In general, the examples presented here tend to broadly support the four phases of development suggested by Webb (1995, pp. 397-400) for the Tolai people in north-east ENBP (see page 9). Many of the processes of diffusion, style development and performance evident from the examples discussed so far no doubt have parallels in other parts of the country.

An important thread drawn from these historical and social considerations is that significant points of socio-cultural upheaval and change through events such as the arrival of missionaries and the Second World War have provided musical resources which, when adapted to varying degrees take on a new syncretised existence as they become part of the new developing culture and associated genres. Some points that emanate from this brief overview are important in emphasising slightly different areas of this view of the development of stringband music in PNG as well. Firstly, using the war as a historical juncture from which to see these developments runs the risk of obscuring the importance and role of pre-war musical activity in constructing the base from which stringband developed. Webb's discussion of the scene in Rabaul pioneers this, as he concludes that "Rabaul's indigenous popular music scene of the 1980s and 1990s... has its roots in cultural practices established as early as the 1910s and 1920s" (Webb 1997, p. 53).

Church music is another consideration through the fact the the basic musical structure (harmonic, melodic, even rhythmic) of church music and later popular musics is so close, at least in drawing heavily on Western structures of tonality. The number of hymnals (see Niles in Zahn 1996, pp. l-lxiv) in numerous local languages, using these aspects of Western tonality, attests to the incorporation of the musical language fundamental to the genesis of

guitar accompaniment, song melodies, and eventually the music of stringband ensembles. Local participation in church music, though extensive, is however inevitably inscribed into the power relationships of the religious institutions. Another way of expressing these developments is that stringband can be seen as representing a shift in existing musical practices towards secular expression, albeit through extensive musical modification, and in doing so re-adjusted those power relationships. Stringband became the first truly *lokal* music as a result. Without wanting to suggest that stringband is a direct secularisation of church music, part of the process is significant in considering the importance of stringband in the PNG music scene. Although 'ownership' is an issue riddled with complicated contradictions in relation to a musical genre that draws so heavily on a wide range of, sometimes distant, sources, there is a very real sense in which stringband had a greater 'ourness' factor (from a local perspective) as it developed. This is, no doubt, why it has been such a significant ongoing genre, widely spread throughout the country.

Other important issues relevant to the consideration of these developments include social changes through employment, education and transport, resulting in people from different places mixing together more. Another issue in considering guitars and ukuleles is the notion of these instruments being partially representative of the incredible diversity and sheer quantity of cargo brought in during the war. This is a proposition requiring a great deal more investigation, but for the purposes of this study it is important to note the status and locally ascribed importance to these instruments as material items.

Analysis of musical style, although focused on the guitar, will provide a further point of departure for discussion regarding regional style in more detail, before embarking on the relationships between stringband and the current popular music scene in chapter four.