

## **‘Music between the volcanoes’: Notes on developing a collaborative local performance history of a colonial port town in the South Pacific**

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### **Abstract**

This article introduces a collaborative ethnomusicological project based on archived field recordings made over 25 years ago. The project relates to a hidden history of music under colonial conditions in and around the port town of Rabaul in Papua New Guinea. It concentrates on developments that occurred during the decades between the volcanic eruptions in Rabaul in 1937 and again in 1993, when the town was largely destroyed. The article documents how the project came about, the working process involved and provides samples of text and visual documentation. The authors’ aims include: to create new knowledge regarding forgotten aspects of the recent past; to contribute to a global history of music; and to return archival content to those to whom it most directly relates – the owners of its stories.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Rabaul, Melanesia, history, music, archives, collaborative ethnomusicology

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### **Introduction**

For six months in 1993, I (Michael) conducted ethnomusicological fieldwork in and around Rabaul in New Britain, Papua New Guinea (PNG).<sup>1</sup> This was the year before the catastrophic volcanic eruption that destroyed one of the most beautiful ports in the South Pacific. I had grown up in PNG in the 1960s and 70s and worked there as an adult for six years in the 1980s. The fieldwork took me back to PNG as part of my PhD studies at Wesleyan University, Connecticut. Fast-forward twenty-five years when in 2018, I responded to a call from PARADISEC—the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures, which is housed

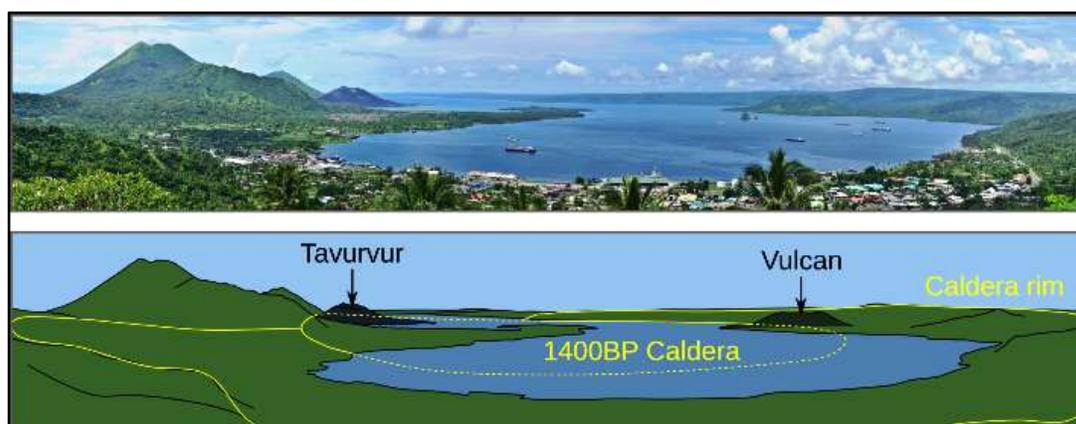
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<sup>1</sup> While I, Michael, drafted this report, it is collaboratively conceived and written, as will be seen.

at the University of Sydney—asking researchers to consider depositing their field recordings in the archive. At PARADISEC, I met Steven (Gagau), a research assistant and cultural advisor. Steven’s hometown is Rabaul, his heritage is Gunantuna or Tolai, and his family comes from the Toma area in the Rabaul hinterland on the Gazelle Peninsula of northeast New Britain.

Steven and I soon formed a friendship that has since developed into a research partnership. Over the course of numerous interactions and conversations, we decided that due to the historical value of the 1993 recordings and the fact that more than a quarter of a century had lapsed since the material was collected, we should undertake a detailed exploration of the contents of the collection. We subsequently conceived a project based on the collection that involves compiling an accessible musical history of Rabaul and the surrounding region under the conditions of missionisation and colonisation. We plan to take this history back to the people of Rabaul so that it can be absorbed by those who own the stories it narrates.

Rabaul and its surrounds are well known for seismic instability. In fact, Rabaul’s *maunten paia* (Tok Pisin: volcano) and the threat it poses to the local communities has been the subject of songs down the years. The twin volcanic cones of Tavurvur and Vulcan erupted in 1937, then again in 1994, the year after I completed my fieldwork. The period in between these eruptions spans the musical activity and developments of those I interviewed as part of the research. For this reason, Steven proposed that we title our project *Music Between the Volcanoes (MBV)*. The project also involves the study of documentary material that extends back to the arrival of Wesleyan Methodist missionaries in 1875. There was an eruption in Blanche Bay in 1878, hence our title encompasses events that took place across the entire ‘colonial century’, 1875 to 1975.



**Figure 1** Panoramic view of Rabaul Caldera overlooking Rabaul town. Comparative images by Dr. Gareth Fabbro, Earth Observatory of Singapore. Used with permission:

<https://earthobservatory.sg/blog/sizing-next-eruption>

Between 2013 and 2017, Rheinhard Strohm led the project ‘Towards a Global History of Music’. Strohm explains that “we can no longer entertain the thought that the history of music for the entire world can be written”, both because such a project is too complex, and because it is Eurocentric, that is, it would involve “dictating the rules by which others should write and explain their music history” (Rauhe, 2017). Historian Klaus Neumann grappled with this issue when he researched and compiled his account of the colonial past of the Tolai people, which he titled *Not the way it really was* (Neumann, 1992). Neumann ended up juxtaposing “a conventional historical narrative [...] structured along a linear chronology and based on written sources with a collage of [his] translations of Tolai stories, with ethnographic descriptions of features of Tolai society, and with observations and interpretations” (Neumann, 1992: 4).

The *MBV* project attempts to follow Neumann's lead by reimagining the telling of music history in the construction of an illustrated narrative that is meaningful to the people of New Britain, New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, and Melanesia more widely. Our approach differs from Neumann's to the extent that it is co-authored—by a team comprised of a member of the specific culture under study and one who is not. The precedent we follow is exemplified in various of the contributions to Katelyn Barney's anthology *Collaborative Ethnomusicology: New Approaches to Music Research Between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians* (Barney, 2014).

Based on groundwork previously undertaken (see Webb, 2015; Webb and Webb-Gannon, 2017; and Webb, 2019) and on what the material explored so far has yielded, the West is to an extent decentred in the narratives that result from the approach Steven and I take (see Stokes, 2018: 3). This is due to the fact that from very early on, the agents in the flow of musical ideas and influences were Pacific Islanders themselves. Moreover, our approach attempts to pay attention to Islanders' shifting categorisation of indigenous and introduced musical domains, rather than the ways Western scholars separate such domains (Stillman, 1993: 98).

Our collaborative intentions also align with recent developments whereby “increasing numbers of archivists and ethnomusicologists have become involved in projects that seek to recover past documents for contemporary use amongst cultural heritage communities” (Landau and Fargion, 2012: 127). From his work in PARADISEC and among the diasporic Melanesian community in Australia, Steven too has found that “archival and other historical sources have become very important for knowledge production today”, not only in relation to “older living and sometimes hidden traditions”, but also with regard to developments under colonialism that have been dismissed as ephemeral or have been otherwise undervalued (Ziegler et al. 2017: 1).

In this report, we attempt to demonstrate that through the combination of our different cultural backgrounds and skillsets, as well as our shared interest and commitment, we are able to articulate and complement what each of us knows and discovers in the research process, which we believe has already begun to result in the production of new knowledge (cf. Sardo, 2018: 230).

## Clearing a working space

We began forging the *MBV* project in 2019. Besides meetings, phone conversations, text exchanges, and more, we met to plan and record what turned out to be two episodes of PARADISEC's *Toksave: Culture Talks* podcast series, which Steven co-produces with his colleague Jodie Kell. *Toksave* was launched in November 2019 (see the PARADISEC website). Then in May 2020, we co-presented a seminar on the nature and direction of our collaboration as part of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music's postgraduate student Music Ethnography Forum series. Even so, given that our project dealt with what Vanessa Agnew terms a “colonial discourse of music” whereby under colonial conditions in the South Pacific music was used as a “criterion of race”, which “stressed the superiority of Western music over indigenous Pacific music” (Agnew, 2005: 44), we realised that we needed to broach the topic of colonisation. I asked Steven whether he was comfortable with exploring cultural aspects of Rabaul's colonial past with me, a cultural outsider who had undertaken research in his community some decades prior to our meeting. Steven jotted down some of his reflections and forwarded them to me; he also agreed that we should incorporate them into this report:

As an indigenous person now living in diaspora in the country of our colonisers, the disparity and inequality my people were made to feel in colonial times has for me diminished. Living in Australia allows me to participate as an equal partner in intellectual and social matters. I am very aware of our colonial past and its impact upon our people, culture and politics. I recognise that there are both positive and negative lessons to be learnt from the various historical stages of colonisation, self-determination and independence, as well as now through decolonisation discourse.

Under the colonial system our people were made to feel inferior in our Melanesian ethnicity and culture—that the coloniser's cultural values were inherently superior to ours. My people the Tolai resisted such exploitation and domination and this resistance became a political game changer that

led to self-governance in PNG the late 1960s early 1970s. It is crucial that we maintain and preserve our history and cultural heritage, traditions and distinct identity, to keep these things alive and healthy in the face of modernisation. The *MBV* project makes an important contribution to this maintenance and preservation.

For me the single biggest benefit of colonisation was my education, which was world standard, and it has allowed me to take my place as a citizen of the world. This has given me the background necessary to undertake projects such as *MBV*, which is in keeping with my passion to utilise my personal, professional and cultural experience and connections to disseminate knowledge of my own culture. Using my education and experience in the academic research space allows me to contribute to providing a more balanced historical and contemporary representation of Melanesian cultures and heritage.

I consider projects like *MBV* to be part of a united human effort in the 21<sup>st</sup> century whereby all people are able to interact and collaborate, treat each other with respect and operate on an equal footing, while valuing each other's perspectives. This helps to build a harmonious and productive global society where our different levels and capacities can complement and benefit one and other. I welcome and embrace collaboration and dialogue with Michael, combining and balancing his academic knowledge and my cultural knowledge towards outputs that are useful and beneficial to Melanesian people.

In the colonial history of Rabaul, as Islanders strove to reshape their society according to their own modern vision, a number of musical people and practices loomed large, in the latter case, choirs, brass bands, and guitar groups. Steven proposed that together we write a book to document these, one based on the material in my collection (now digitised at PARADISEC) and suited to a general readership. Further, he proposed that it be titled and organised as follows:

### **MUSIC BETWEEN THE VOLCANOES**

#### ***Singers, Songs and Sounds of Rabaul, Papua New Guinea, 1937 to 1994***

- Chapter 1 Choirs and conductors
- Chapter 2 Brass band pioneers
- Chapter 3 Singers, guitarists and guitar bands
- Chapter 4 Radio and recording
- Chapter 5 Festivals and competitions

Steven based his ideas on both historical chronology and his personal experience of the cultural significance of musical developments in the region under missionisation and colonisation. His proposal spurred me on to search for additional documentary evidence that corroborated and supported the content of the interviews in the field collection. Figure 2 (below) was sourced from the family of Inspector David Crawley in Australia; Figures 3 and 4 are reproduced from newspaper accounts that were contemporary to events described in the collection and hence in our proposed book. This became part of our working process on the collection.

Given that aspects of the choralism depicted in Figure 4 are taken up in more detail below, a few remarks regarding both brass band formation and guitar group creativity (Figures 2 and 3) in Rabaul are offered at this point. Against considerable odds, beginning around 1937, the Englishman David Crawley recruited and rehearsed in seclusion in Rabaul what later became the first Native Police Constabulary Band in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. The story of this band and its offshoot ensemble is most remarkable and will be explored in full in *MBV*. Crawley's first bandmen were mostly Tolai youths, some of whom originally played in a bugle band at the Waterhouse school in Nodup, north of Rabaul town, and who went on to have illustrious careers in music and public service.



**Figure 2** Members of the first Native Police Constabulary Band formed in Rabaul in the late 1930s by Inspector David Crawley. Left to right: Savenat, Rupen Ruru, Nelson ToKiel, and ToPoipoi. Source: Crawley Family Collection. Used with permission.

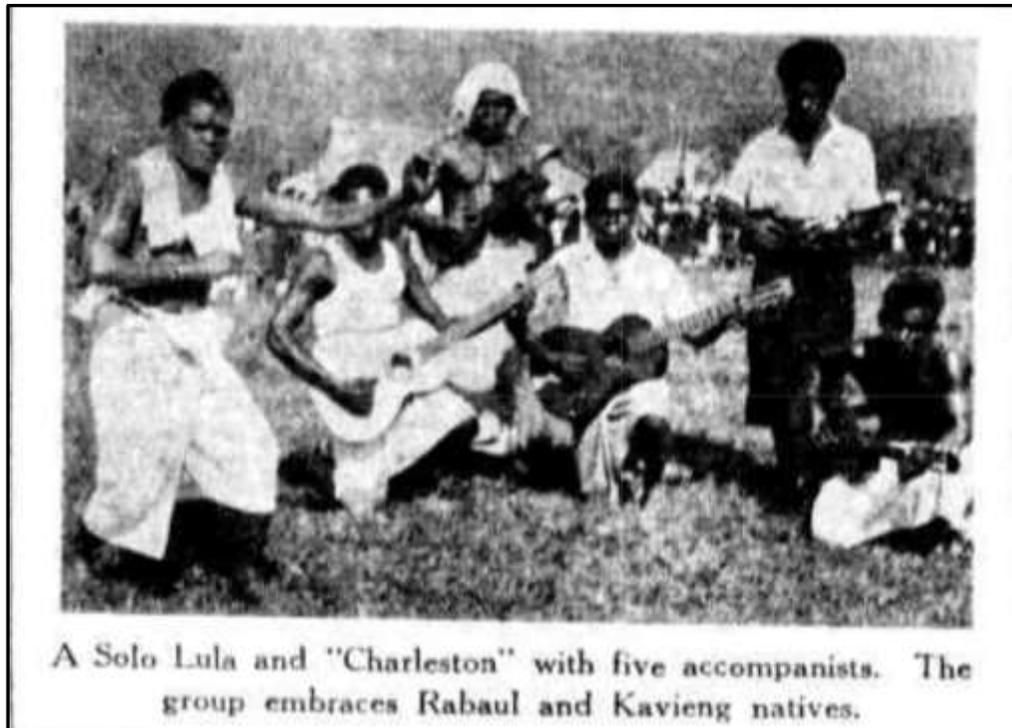


Figure 3 A string band Rabaul and Kavieng (New Ireland) men formed on the Wau goldfields in the 1930s. Source: *The Age*, 8 February 1936, p. 5.



Figure 4 A hymn of welcome set to the anthem tune, sung in Simpson Harbour, Rabaul, to Australian visitors attending the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Methodism in New Britain and New Ireland. Source: *The Missionary Review*, 3 October 1925, p. 17.

Regarding the string bands, very little is popularly known about the origins of this local music form, which was widely practiced across the entire Melanesian region for at least half a century. The archival collection contains stories and several recordings relating to the musical feats of the Tolai man John Wowono, who learnt to play guitar while working on the Wau goldfields and who brought his skills and creativity back to Rabaul. It is not widely known that by the 1950s, Rabaul had become such a centre for modern guitar-based musical creativity that the Brisbane firm Dandy Drum Co. filled large orders—batches of one hundred—of custom-made guitars, the sound boards of which were crafted from imported German spruce.<sup>2</sup>

## An equitable working process

Below is an outline of the working process we developed relating to the production of entries for our *MBV* history volume following which is an entry exemplar. This relates to Chapter 1 Conductors and choirs, specifically the Tolai conductors Ephraim Tami and Romalus Matition:

1. Steven (SG) listens to the relevant interviews and writes a summary of their contents in the order in which they appear. Due to his linguistic and cultural expertise, he picks up details missed by Webb in his 1995 PhD thesis.
2. Michael (MW) drafts biographical portraits based on SG's notes and supplements these with selected (translated) quotes from the interviews and occasional footnoted citations from corroborative historical sources. MW adds prefatory information that attempts to encapsulate the wider significance of the interview content, which SG checks.
3. SG goes over MW's draft for accuracy and provides further cultural clarification where required and compares the text with information that is brought to light in other interviews in the collection. Notably, SG expresses keenness to include as many people's names as possible, as this is a history crafted specifically for the descendants of the people who lived it.
4. MW and SG agree on a final version of the text.

## A text example

### Field interview details

I (Michael) interviewed Diana Nian and Mabel Kurai, Ephraim Tami's daughter and niece respectively, on 12 August 1993 at Rapindik, on the fringe of Matupit close to the airport. I interviewed Romalus Matition on 20 August 1993 at Tavana, which is across Blanche Bay from Matupit and situated behind the volcanic mountain Kalamaganunan (Vulcan) with its twin cones. Romalus' wife and his daughter IaRudy were present at the interview; IaRudy served as translator-interpreter.

### Prefatory paragraph

A large-scale choral movement flourished in Rabaul on the Gazelle Peninsula, PNG in the middle decades of the twentieth century (1940s–1960s). It was fuelled by pride, ambition and jealousy, as well as community solidarity and sonic exuberance. In retrospect, it can be seen that choralism in Rabaul involved a struggle to reconcile customary musical beliefs and practices, Christian ideals and expressions, and modernist aspirations. Above all, it resounded with the desire to overcome colonial domination. Facets of the movement are encapsulated in the musical biographies of two of its key figures, Ephraim Tami and Romalus Matition, both of whom were from Matupit, a small island on the outer tip of Simpson Harbour in Blanche Bay.

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<sup>2</sup> Made in Queensland. *Brisbane Telegraph*, 5 August 1954, p. 29.

## Chapter 1 entries

## EPHRAIM TAMI

Ephraim Tami was born at the beginning of the 1900s during the time of German colonial rule. He began his education at a school established at Namanula in 1906, where he learned to speak and write German. Tami worked as a typesetter at the Government Printing Office during which time he came under the musical tutelage of J. H. L. ‘Harry’ Waterhouse, who was clerk to the Chairman of the Methodist Mission, 1917–1921. Waterhouse became a key musical figure in the Rabaul area.<sup>3</sup> Although he had no formal qualification in education, during the 1920s, he served as a school headmaster at the Methodist Mission in Roviana, Solomon Islands, where he founded one of the first brass bands in the Melanesian islands.

In 1933, following his return to Rabaul, Waterhouse established what became a model school for local youths, at Nodup five kilometres from town. According to a visitor to the school, Waterhouse implemented a

very ingenious system for teaching the boys to sing [...]. Since they have no piano available, they use a method one step beyond tonic solfa. Music is translated into a system of numbers, instead of notes, and the boys read with remarkable facility. [...] [T]he Nodup boys’ rendering of four-part songs leaves absolutely nothing to be desired in the way of harmony.<sup>4</sup>

At this time, Waterhouse resumed instructing Tami and two other men, Isikel Mulat and Apelis ToManiot, whom he had begun tutoring well over a decade earlier.

According to a newspaper report, Tami’s public debut with his Matupit Choir took place on 9 November 1934:

The native arts and crafts exhibition was opened last night by the Deputy Administrator. Exhibits include native-made utensils from far distant parts, including Mount Hagen and Sepik. They are of ethnological and economic interest. The programme included native singing, Matupi islanders rendering excellently the Hallelujah Chorus and Gloria Twelfth [by Müller].<sup>5</sup> The mass harmony was exceptionally good.<sup>6</sup>

This moment represented the transition of choral singing from the church out into the public square. A later report noted that they “trained from gramophone records”,<sup>7</sup> which is an interesting claim given that Anton ToMana told the anthropologist Bill Epstein “the first New Guinean to learn Western musical notation” came from Matupit (Epstein, 1992, 237). It is likely ToMana was referring to Ephraim Tami, although he may have had in mind the Roman Catholic catechist Stephen ToPaivu.<sup>8</sup> Either way, as already mentioned, Harry Waterhouse taught cipher or numeric notation to Tami and others.

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<sup>3</sup> In the early years, Tolai choirmasters often thought of their European teachers as cultural mentors; white *tena kakailai* (master songmen) from whom they inherited arcane cultural knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> His School. *Dungog Chronicle*, Friday 11 September 1942, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Another staple of the Victorian choral repertoire, the ‘Gloria Twelfth’ is a piece often attributed to W. A. Mozart’s Twelfth Mass, although it is now believed to have been composed by the Viennese composer of light opera Wenzel Müller, a contemporary of Mozart.

<sup>6</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, Saturday 10 November 1934, p. 6. Formerly, the final ‘t’ was dropped from Matupit when used as an adjective.

<sup>7</sup> *Pacific Islands Monthly*, December 1948 19(5): 15.

<sup>8</sup> A “famous Matupit native choir” was already in operation on the island when Tami began training his Methodist choir. This was founded by the Roman Catholic Mission and led by the catechist Stephen ToPaivu. 1882—The New Britain Mission—1932, *The Catholic Press*, Thursday 20 October 1932, p. 6.

In 1935, the year following their debut, Tami and his Matupit choir performed for passengers from the cruise ship *Oronsay*, at Rakunai where Rabaul's white settlers had created a racecourse. According to the *Rabaul Times*, the "racing will be exceptionally good and equally so the seven native 'sing-sings,' and the choir, which is a special feature".<sup>9</sup> In the years leading up to the Japanese invasion of Rabaul in early 1942, Tami and his choir continued to perform for visiting tourists, including a performance aboard the *Katoomba* in Simpson Harbour in 1939 that included a number of choruses from Handel's *Messiah*.

In 1935, the Methodist missionary the Reverend Percy Clark and his wife Dorothy established the George Brown choral festival, which became an annual event. This marked the beginning of the Rabaul choral movement proper. In the 1930s and early 1940s, Tami and his choir found a prominent place in both Mission and civic celebrations, and it is evident from the written record that the conductor was keen to perform before Europeans.

At the end of 1937, volcanoes on either side of Simpson Harbour erupted, resulting in widespread chaos and the death of more than five hundred villagers. Two years later, Tami inaugurated an indigenous counterpart to the Europeans' Frangipani Ball that celebrated Rabaul's return to normalcy. The Matupit Choir performed songs especially composed to mark the occasion, which probably consisted of newly composed texts in Kuanua and Tok Pisin set to existing music, possibly hymn tunes. The *Rabaul Times* reported:

On Monday afternoon last the Matupi natives arranged to celebrate a holiday in their own peculiar manner, and as they are noted for being singers, the paramount luluai [village leader], Tami, staged a very creditable selection of native songs, to European tunes and rendered in excellent harmony by the Matupi Choir. After the singing had taken place, the natives took up their positions on the local cricket oval, dividing themselves into family groups, and in possession of large quantities of food, consisting of all kinds of delicacies, such as curried rice and boiled fowl, fish, taro and sweet potatoes, and every imaginable kind of vegetable. It was apparent that no food shortage existed. After the feast, further vocal selections were given by the choir, in which they voiced their gratitude for surviving the 1937 eruption.<sup>10</sup>

Then in 1940, the Matupit Choir "provided the main musical part of the program" at the opening of the Cox Memorial Methodist Church office building in Rabaul. Rodger Brown recalled, "I remember them singing 'Worthy is the Lamb' from *The Messiah* led by their conductor Tami, who was one of the great New Guinean musicians" (Brown, 2001: 41). It should not be overlooked that Tami contributed hymn texts to the Tolai language hymnal *A Buk na Kakailai*.<sup>11</sup>

The Pacific War left Ephraim with a bad tropical ulcer on his leg. The leg had to be amputated so that from then onwards he walked with the aid of crutches. Despite this, he continued to conduct with the aid of a box on which he rested the stump of his amputated leg. Tami taught his young niece Lila IaMatalau to conduct and lead a female choir at Matupit. Lila became the first female conductor among Gazelle Peninsula Methodists. She also went on to become a primary school teacher at the Matupit and Tavui villages, and she sewed the uniforms for both Tami's Matupit Village Choir and her own Matupit Women's Choir.

Ephraim Tami died in 1957, and Lila IaMatalau died in 1972. Ephraim Tami Jr. continued his father's musical legacy in choral music and string bands.

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<sup>9</sup> *Rabaul Times*, 8 August 1935, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Rabaul Times*, 2 June 1939, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> The 1984 edition of *A Buk na Kakailai* included three hymns by Tami: numbers 61, 188, and 444.

## ROMALUS MATITION

Romalus Matition was born during World War I. From 1929 until the eruption of Mt. Tavurvur at Matupit in 1937, he attended the Malaguna Technical School, which opened in 1922. Romalus knew of Ephraim Tami who had a printing job.

Waterhouse trained Tami in the art of choral conducting, and Tami rose to prominence as a musician in the Rabaul area, beginning in the mid-1930s. He in turn trained and led the (Methodist) Matupit Choir in performances at Rabaul festival-competitions, as well as for the passengers of tourist ships that visited Rabaul. Among those who followed in Tami's musical footsteps were students from the Waterhouse school: Isikel Mulat, Apelis Maniot, Arthur Wama, and ToKingoro. The Methodist Mission trainee Michael ToBilak was also taught how to compose and translate hymns, which were included in the Kuanua hymnal *Buk na Kakailai*. These early musicians became conductors and choirmasters, and they passed on their knowledge and skills to others in various parts of the Gazelle Peninsula—Matalau, Tavui, Pilapila, Kabakada, Raluana, and Vunamami.

Romalus, who was younger than Tami, went to work alongside the conductor in order to learn from him, however some members of the Matupit Choir and even Tami himself were unhappy with this arrangement. Thus, it was agreed that the choir would divide into two groups: singers living near Rarup came under Tami's direction, and those from around Kikila went with Romalus. The two choirs performed back-to-back at important Mission events such as the opening of a new church at Rabaul Native Hospital in 1951. Matition conducted Matupit Village Choir No. 1 (the Australian Administration divided Matupit into three 'villages' of which Kikila was designated no. 1), while Tami conducted the so-named Matupit Village Choir (although Rarup was designated village no. 2).<sup>12</sup> They subsequently competed against each other in Rabaul choral festivals, and although Romalus was largely self-taught musically since Tami failed to support him, he led Kikila's Matupit No. 1 Choir to victory in the Village Choir division of the town festival in 1951 and 1952. Tami and his followers resented Romalus' success, which further exacerbated friction among members of the choirs, as well as other Matupit residents.

Musical knowledge and repertoire were closely guarded secrets, and according to Romalus, choirs and their conductors were fixated on one thing only: winning the shield trophy. While he enjoyed public acclaim, Romalus was distressed by the split of the Matupit Choir. Around this time, he became involved with the Native Council system being trialled on the Gazelle Peninsula, and there may have been jealousy over his public advancement. Romalus' daughter IaRudy explained:

We noticed the first signs of his mental illness in 1953. He was conducting and teaching the choir a song when the [kerosene] pressure lamp blew up—as if to prevent him from continuing. And it did stop him—he quit conducting from that point onwards! It was a Tilley lamp. The lamp exploded, inside the church! We figured they [his opponents] were [using sorcery] to prevent him from conducting anymore, so that he could no longer teach music to anyone. And from that point on he had a mental breakdown.

Matition was sent to Port Moresby and for the next five years, he received treatment at Laloki Psychiatric Hospital. He eventually recovered and returned to Matupit, where he lived a quieter life and later moved to Tavana across the harbour from Matupit. He never resumed conducting.

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<sup>12</sup> *Rabaul News*, 4 August 1951.

During the interview, Romalus sang a song he learned at the Malaguna Technical School in the 1930s, which was in effect the school song. Written by a European schoolteacher, the text began, “O New Guinea my island homeland, the place where I ever want to be” and contained these lines, which he struggled to recall:

See the flag floating proudly before us  
It's so wonderful and new  
With the flag of Australia above us  
We cheer for the red white and blue.<sup>13</sup>

The song is of interest as possibly the earliest nationalistic anthem to be sung in the Australian Mandated Territory.

## Conclusion

Landau and Fargion (2012: 131) note with regard to the PNG music context that “an enormous amount is achieved politically and ethically in bringing [archival] content home”.

At the outset, we noted that a key aim of our kind of research partnership—between a member of the culture being studied and an outsider to that culture—was the production of new knowledge, a kind of knowledge of the culture that might not otherwise emerge. In the Tolai memory, some of the people included in our *MBV* project loom larger than life—John Wowono, for example, whose guitar could be heard for miles around, and Ephraim Tami, who fostered a choral sound to match the output of a colonial brass band. These and other men and women were pioneers in various walks of life in those times of seismic-scale social and cultural upheaval.

Much is known about local Tolai political innovators and their accomplishments, but far less about cultural ones in the New Britain region. Melanesians deserve to be able to celebrate the remarkable creative figures and events that made the vision of a politically independent state a reality by the 1970s. It is our hope the *MBV* project will make a small contribution to fostering pride in such past achievements before the memory of them is further dimmed. To this end, we are grateful for archives such as PARADISEC that keep safe the traces of history as they await rediscovery by their cultural heritage community.

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<sup>13</sup> A remark by the Australian children's author Ella McFadyen following a visit in 1927 to the Malaguna school confirms this recollection: “they sing what is meant to correspond to our ‘Advance, Australia.’ It is ‘Oh, New Guinea, My Island Home,’ and is sung to the air of ‘The Red, White, and Blue.’” Rabaul Schoolboys. In the Stone Age. *Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 20 August 1927, p. 11. This tune is better known as ‘Columbia, gem of the ocean,’ a nineteenth century American patriotic song. It can be found in score form at Hymnary.org: [https://hymnary.org/text/o\\_columbia\\_the\\_gem\\_of\\_the\\_ocean](https://hymnary.org/text/o_columbia_the_gem_of_the_ocean)

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## Authors' biographies

Michael Webb is an ethnomusicologist and Associate Professor at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, The University of Sydney. He grew up in PNG in the 1960s-70s. Michael is a co-author of *Music in Pacific Island Cultures* (OUP, 2011).

Steven Gagau is a Tolai from Toma, near Rabaul, PNG. He is a research assistant and cultural advisor at PARADISEC where his work involves developing strategies for community-led engagement with archival materials for the preservation of language, culture and music.

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