

ROTUMA

Near the intersection of Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia, Rotuma borrowed heavily from its neighbors—in music as in language. Rotumans have long claimed that all their songs and dances but the class known as *tautoga* are imports (Gardiner 1898:488). By blending borrowed and indigenous traits, Rotumans have generated a unique musical repertory.

A volcanic island of approximately 43 square kilometers, Rotuma rises to about 215 meters. It lies 500 kilometers north of Viti Levu, from where, in the late 1990s, biweekly flights were scheduled; government and private shipping provided additional, though irregular, transportation between Fijian ports and Rotuma.

Mythology attributes the creation of the island, and the founding of the society, to Raho, supposedly a Sāmoan chief. Early in the 1700s, Ma'afu, a Tongan chief from Niuafu'ou, reportedly conquered Rotuma (Churchward 1937:255). Legends portray him as an oppressor, killed by rebelling Rotumans; nevertheless, the title *Maraf*, an obvious cognate, remains the premier title.

In 1791, H.M.S. *Pandora* became the first European ship to visit Rotuma.

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Christianity arrived in 1839, when John Williams assigned two Sāmoan teachers to the island; but they were unsuccessful, and in 1841, Tongan Wesleyans replaced them. In 1847, Roman Catholic missionaries arrived. Sectarian antagonisms mounted, culminating in 1878 in a war won by the numerically dominant side, the Methodists. Continuing unrest led the paramount chiefs of the seven districts to petition Britain for annexation. In 1881, the year of cession, Rotuma became administratively part of Fiji. In the late 1990s, the population on the island was about twenty-six hundred; but three times as many Rotumans lived on Viti Levu, mainly in Suva.

Performative contexts

At special occasions, no major gathering occurs without performances for which groups compose (*hā'i*) celebratory songs and dances. Depending on the size of a festival (*kato'aga*), performances range from an hour of informal singing around a few guitars (*kitā*) and ukuleles (*ukalele*), to daylong sessions in which rehearsed groups formally sing and dance. At domestic ceremonies, such as weddings or the raisings of gravestones (*hōt'ak hāfu*), songs honor featured persons. When a group from one village or district performs at another location, it presents songs to honor its hosts: texts reference local chiefs, pertinent events, and outstanding features of the community or landscape. Annual events (such as Cession Day, and the Methodist Church Conference), and specially scheduled events (a high dignitary's visit, the dedication of a new building), spur groups to polish their performances. In Suva in 1974, at the dedication of Churchward Chapel, groups presented songs praising C. Maxwell Churchward (Methodist missionary), for whom the congregation named the building; songs also praised the architect, and likened the structure to a spaceship.

On some occasions (like the Methodist Church Conference), performances occur within a competitive framework. Judges rate presentations by unity, degree of difficulty, and appearance (costume, stance, expression). At these performances, audiences enthusiastically receive successful innovations.

During celebrations, public musical performances occur where convenient: for a religious occasion, in or next to a church; for a wedding, near the bride's home; for a feast, at the host's house. To receive guests, some villages maintain open public spaces (*marā'e*), where they erect sheds for protection from rain and sun. Informal singing or dancing may precede the serving of kava and food; but formal presentations routinely follow feasting, with performers facing the high chiefs and featured guests.

Music forms an integral part of playtimes (*av manē'a*), periods set aside for socializing. Most notable is the four-to-six-week period during December and January, when few people work. On the grounds of selected houses, youths sing and dance to the accompaniment of guitars and ukuleles. In reward, residents sprinkle them with perfumed powders and spray them with cologne; if adequate supplies are on hand, hosts also dispense soft drinks and food.

In premissionary times, nubile youths frequented houses set aside for dancing

FIGURE 24 Rotuman women enjoy a sing-along. Photo by Alan Howard, 1960.



and played beachgames (*mané'a hunc'ele*), including singing and dancing, which provided culturally controlled frames for courtship. Missionaries, fearing immorality, curbed such gatherings. In the current version of beachgames, young people informally gather around a guitar, often under the auspices of the church, to perform hymns and other religious songs (figure 24). In the 1980s, activity began to give way to passivity—listening to cassette recordings. Guitars, ukuleles, and cassettes are unavailable for purchase on the island, but returning sojourners bring them home.

Composers are known as *manatu*; with lead singers, they are known as *purotu*. Several persons have attained local reputations as composers. Some older people keep musical texts in notebooks, which, to consult while planning performances, they sometimes bring to meetings. A few Rotuman bands (*pāne*) have composed and recorded songs in popular Polynesian styles.

No survey of indigenous musical instruments remains, though Rotumans said in 1932 they had once had a nose-blown flute and a panpipe (MacGregor n.d.). By the mid-1900s, rhythmic beating on a pile of folded mats had become the only normative accompaniment to *tautoga*; it may have replaced striking a log idiophone (Eason 1951:23). Metallic idiophones, made from bicycle bells, bullet casings, or other hollow metal containers and struck with a nail or metal strip, accompany a new kind of hymn, *mak pel* (from English *bell*).

Indigenous songs

At the time of European intrusion, Rotuman music included recitations, dances with paddles, and *tautoga*.

Recitations

Mosese Kaurasi (1991) distinguishes three types of Rotuman recitation: texts composed for dances and songs with movements; texts intoned before battles or wrestling matches; and *temo*, performed during a chief's funeral, or at a reception for a visiting chief.

Songs with movements commemorate special events or occasions, including war-provoking incidents, the deaths of notable persons, successful seafaring ventures, and festivals involving two or more communities. Their sentiments vary circumstantially, in moods from solemn to exultant. In 1926, the Reverend Kirione, a Wesleyan

minister, composed the following text to mark the end of festivities involving groups from Faguta and Motusa (Kaurasi 1991:143).

Hanis 'e soro te Faguta!	Pity the troupe from Faguta!
Hauen ava la a'u'ua,	The time to stop has come,
Fufui ne is Moitaua	For the flock of Moitaua Point
Orsio ka hanua la malua.	To rest and yarn as the sun sets.

To mobilize sentiment and muster courage (*māeva*), the songs and dances performed before battles were textually belligerent and kinemically aggressive (Kaurasi 1991:147):

Kaf se' po',	Clap your folded arm,
Hula hula majei taro.	And wrestle in pairs till darkness falls.
'Apsi' la' kel hula,	Stroll to watch the wrestling match,
To' filo'ua le' herua.	And witness the snapping off of wrestlers' heads.

In form, such songs resembled songs for wrestling matches (*hula*), though the latter, usually tempered by good-natured teasing, alternated in exchange between hosts and guests.

Temo praise deceased individuals, respected chiefs, and special places. Before Christianization, mourners sang them at funerals. Leaders chose a tempo and started the singing; they sat close to selected others, facing inward, and the rest of the company sat around them. The leaders performed in sets of four: the first three *temo* were slow and subdued; the fourth, quick and bright, with clapping. The chorus accompanied by humming (*vered'aki*) a drone.

The melodies of *temo* usually have a range no larger than a perfect fourth, plus indefinitely pitched notes wailed in high registers. By about a semitone, singers depress the pitches of notes, and then slide back up again. *Temo* end in a downward slide, with diminishing volume. In 1932, their volume was "so low that one feels that those outside the circle are not supposed to hear or understand the words. The clapping too is very soft. The best chanting of *temos* resembles the singing of toothless old men" (MacGregor n.d.). By 1960, *temo* had fallen out of use.

Dances with paddles

People performed dances with paddles (*mak paki*) within the ritual cycle associated with the offices of *sau* and *mua*, spiritual representatives of the unified polity. Because the dances originated in pagan worship, they fell into disuse after the 1870s, when Christianization had become complete.

In 1865, a missionary witnessed a dance of "mostly elderly men": each performer held a paddle, and

the *sau* and the *mueta* [*mua*] stood together, all the rest squatted down near them. Rising up, they commenced a song, raising the legs alternately, and brandishing the paddles. The song over, they rushed, one half one way, and one half the other way, and meeting in the centre of the square, stood in two lines, the *sau* and the *mueta* being in the centre of the front line. A man sat before a native drum to beat time, and lead the chanting. All joined, moving the legs, and gently brandishing the paddles, now giving them an oscillating movement on the front of the head, and again striking them gently with the tips of the fingers of the left hand. At intervals, the back line dividing into two went round and joined again in front of the line, where stood the *sau* and the *mueta*, which line in its turn divided, and

FIGURE 25 Rotumans perform a *tautoga*. Photo by Alan Howard, 1960.



passed to the front. In each song these evolutions were gone through five or six times. The whole may have lasted about half an hour. (Fletcher 1866; letter, 4 November 1865)

Severed from their original context by the 1880s, dances with paddles continued in secular settings, where they highlighted special celebrations.

Tautoga

Reserved for large festivals, these songs and dances embody late-twentieth-century Rotuman taste. Men and women arrange themselves in rows, men on one side, women on the other (figure 25). Movements occur in synchrony: men's are vigorous and coarse; women's, restrained and delicate.

Costumes include lavalavas (*hāfali*), usually of uniform color and design: women wear theirs down to the ankles; men, to just below the knee. Over the lavalavas, from the waist, hang ti-leaf skirts (*titi*). Dancers adorn themselves with garlands (*tefui*) made from young coconut-palm leaves, supplemented by sweet-smelling flowers, tied together with colorful wool. Men's skirts and garlands are more elaborately decorated than women's. Women usually let their hair down, as a "mark of respect and deference" (Hereniko 1991:133).

In form, a complete *tautoga* is a suite of pieces in three types: from one to three *sua*, one or two *tiap hī'i*, and two or more *tiap forau*; in a complete performance, at least one example of each type occurs. For *sua* and *tiap forau*, elders provide accompaniment: with wooden sticks, several people beat on a pile of folded mats; they begin each dance by introducing the song, and take responsibility for sustaining the rhythm and the tempo. In *sua* and the *tiap hī'i*, each of the first three rows of dancers takes its turn in front; after completing a set of verses, the dancers in the first row drop back, and the row behind them comes forward (Hereniko 1991:128–130).

Sua

For *sua*, dancers stand in place: men, with their feet apart; women, with their feet together. The basic movement involves lifting the hands from the sides, clasping them together in front of the waist, and releasing them to the sides. Dancers repeatedly bend and straighten their legs.

Sua normally consist of four-verse stanzas, whose texts allude to the occasion.

FIGURE 26 Rotuman songs recorded in rehearsal in Oinafa Village, 1989: *a* and *b*, two *sua*; *c*, a *hi' tūgtūg*. Transcriptions by J. W. Love.

The musical score for Figure 26 is organized into three sections: *a*, *b*, and *c*. Each section features a different accompaniment: a drum in *a* and *b*, and clapping in *c*. The vocal parts are for Women and Men, written in 2/4 time. The lyrics are in Rotuman, with English translations provided below the notes.

Section a: Drum accompaniment. Women's part: *hi- 'i e, hi- 'i ē, hi- 'i ē, hi- 'i ē.* Men's part: *hū- 'i, hū- 'i, hū- 'i, hū- 'i.*

Section b: Drum accompaniment. Women's part: *hi- 'i e, hi- 'i ē, hi- 'i ē, hi- 'i ē.* Men's part: *hū- 'i, hū- 'i, hū- 'i, hū- 'i.*

Section c: Clapping accompaniment. Women's part: *hi- 'i e, hi- 'i ē, hi- 'i ē, hi- 'i ē.* Men's part: *hū- 'i, hū- 'i, hū- 'i, hū- 'i.*

The music consists of a single phrase in duple meter, repeated many times. One recorded performance (figure 26*a*) ended during the twentieth statement of the phrase. The performers sing a melody in parallel fifths, with women on the upper part. Sometimes (as at the beginning of figure 26*b*), singers sound other notes, creating three- or four-note harmonies.

Tiap hi'i

After *sua* come *tiap hi'i*, dances of two kinds. In one, *hi' tūgtūg* 'languid drone', women sing *hi' iē*, *hi' iē*, *hi' iē*, *hi' iē*, while men grunt *hū' ū*, *hū' ū*, *hū' ū*, *hū' ū* (figure 26*c*). The performers focus on a major triad: men sing the root; women, the third and fifth. A subdominant triad serves as an auxiliary. The performers clap their hands on downbeats. The transcribed performance has thirty-seven statements of the indicated phrase; after the nineteenth, the tempo begins to increase sharply. In the other kind of *tiap hi'i*, the *hi' sasap* 'sustained drone', the men drag out their *hū*. In both subgenres, some singers breathe while others vocalize, so the performance spins a continuous thread of sound.

Performances of *tiap hi'i* mark the contrast between feminine constraint and masculine freedom. Women stand in place, as in the *sua*; they confine their movements to graceful, subtle motions of the hands and arms. Men may jump from side to side, or in circles. In one version, men maintain a textless drone, while women sing four or eight verses, recounting legends.

Tiap forau

Unlike *sua* and *tiap hi'i*, which have a temperate character, *tiap forau* feature the exuberance of yelping and clowning; spectators may spontaneously join in. During the dance, the back row splits: the men come down one side of the group, the women down the other, until they meet in front, replacing the first row; the process continues until each row has had its turn in front. The texts usually acknowledge distinguished personages (especially chiefs acting as hosts), and praise people whose labors have contributed to the event (Hereniko 1991:130–131). Many *tiap forau* are in duple meter, transcribable as 2/4 time; some are in a triply compound meter, transcribable as 6/8 time.

Twentieth-century developments

Wesleyan and Roman Catholic missionaries introduced hymns, which are central in Rotuman sacred contexts, and even occur in secular ones. In 1927–1928, C. M. Churchward prepared the Rotuman Wesleyan hymnal, *Him Ne Rot Uesli*; others revised it in 1986–1989. It contains 405 Rotuman hymns in sol-fa notation.

Performances of hymns take two styles: one is based on four-part harmony; in the other, *mak pel*, a struck metal idiophone keeps time. Gatherings of the Methodist Youth Fellowship sing religious songs in English and Rotuman, sometimes between skits on biblical themes.

Rotumans have adopted foreign styles of singing and dancing as they have come to know them through travel, films, radio (mostly Fijian stations), and video. In the 1990s, many Rotumans knew of the Sāmoan *mā'ulu'ulu* (via its Tongan analog) and *sāsā*, the Fijian *vakamalolo*, and dances from Tahiti, Kiribati, and elsewhere. Pan-Polynesian harmonized music is popular, with Rotuman words often substituted for the originals. The favorite foreign musical genre is Rarotongan, introduced by Rarotongans who in the late 1940s visited Rotuma for months. Rotumans associate Rarotongan-style dances with playtimes.

—ALAN HOWARD