



Members of the club rest between rehearsals. Photo Bruce Conew

Patea Maori Club change their tune

By Yvonne Dasler

A hundred years ago when a Maori kid sang a popular song, the words were in his own language. Today most pop music comes with shoop-shooping English lyrics and Maori music is rarely heard away from the marae. But the Patea Maori Club and Maui Records are out to change all that.

"There was a feeling that our popular culture was at a standstill," says club leader Sam Prime, "so we've slightly moved and updated Maori music, put a reggae beat in it and given it Maori words and a Maori flavour to give the disco kids something to sing and dance to."

The club's first pop record "Poi E," with lyrics by Ngoi Pewhairangi and music by Dalvanus and Barletta was a runaway success. Within a fortnight of release it was in the finals of the prestigious NZ Music Awards.

Sitting in the swanky new Michael Fowler Centre for the awards dinner in Wellington was the culmination of weeks of rehearsals and a gruelling recording session. Although the club had previously made two LPs of its traditional chants and waiata, members were unprepared for the different world of pop music. "In the earlier ones, all we did was stand up and sing," says Prime. "This time it took two days. All the parts were recorded separately — even the band — then mixed later and the twiddly bits added."

Recording the video to promote "Poi

E" overseas and accompany the song on "Ready To Roll" and "Radio With Pictures" was far more fun. Club members rollerskated down the main street, posed under the monument to Turi's canoe in the main street and filled the High School Hall with smoke bombs to get special effects.

The club has been on an upward swing since it was formed by the Rev Napi Waaka in 1967 as the Patea Methodist Maori Club. Since then, it has picked up more than its share of awards. The massive Te Kani Te Ua Trophy for traditional chant sits among other awards above the milkshake flavours and to the right of the straws in the local burger bar. Club members have been chosen to travel with national groups to Papua New Guinea in 1974, China in 1979, Hong Kong in 1981 and on three trips to the United States. Another is planned this year.

The move into pop music doesn't mean the club has abandoned its role as preserver of South Taranaki's choral history. It plans to hold on to its trophies and is cheeky enough to aim to win more at next year's Polynesian Festival.

With the closure of the Patea freezing works many families have had to move away from the district to find work, but they are determined to retain their links with the club. Rehearsals become rollicking reunions at Pureroa marae as members come home from

Auckland, Dannevirke and Palmerston North for weekend practices.

Of the 40 adult members who remain in Patea, only three now have permanent jobs. While this means more time for practising and tutoring the 40 juniors, it means members are hard pressed financially. "We're not able to travel the way we used to," says Sam Prime. "We're forced to tell people who invite us to perform in other centres that we can only come if they pay our travelling expenses."

Most find the expense worthwhile. The club's first major engagement for the year will be to perform at Te Kopu Fashion Awards in Hamilton early this year. Locally (and for free) their talents are sought to give concerts for old folks and performances at gala days. Club members also sing regularly at funerals throughout South Taranaki. "Our policy is that if people are good enough to invite us and want to hear us sing, then it's only polite to agree," says Prime.

Somehow, they find time to rehearse for their next record release. "It'll be an album and the songs are mainly about the revival of the maraes. The lyrics are on authentic themes, but the music and presentation are upbeat," says Prime.

Although the club no longer has the Methodist tag in its name, it still meets weekly in the church hall. Laughs Prime: "We had to drop the name; we were outvoted by all our Ratana and