

Aotearoa, young gifted and brown.

Aotearoa will never be as popular as a band as Herbs have become. That is if Aotearoa keep their kaupapa, positive music for young Maori, and if radio stations and television keep to theirs by not playing the music.

That's the attraction with this Maori band, Aotearoa, their large following amongst Maori youth may be partly due to the 'underground' nature of the message and elitism involved in the protest. But the larger part is the musical ability and dogged determination of the only founder member left, Ngahiwi Apanui.

Two years or so on he admits to being only now able to relax and not overdo things, either in organising the band or worrying about how the message is being received. "It was sheer exhaustion at times but now I'm able to appreciate the support of bandmembers, just a word of thanks means heaps."

Aotearoa got started on the basis of having to record two songs, 'Maranga' and 'Haruru ana'. Ngahiwi says they wanted to get the message out to young Maori people that it was OK to be Maori. He felt that although Maori

music was heard through the singing of Prince Tui Teke and the Patea Maori Club, young Maori preferred overseas reggae and funk music. Aotearoa's aim was to use the reggae and funk beats and take out the overseas messages and put in positive Maori ones.

He sees now that they had a very narrow view that later widened into a much more embracing perspective. Like they discovered that singing about Maori pride also encompassed not knowing Maori language or tikanga, and living with that." He says they felt that it was a compromise because the Maori language was the major cultural component. "That's what made it Maori, all the instruments and music influences were Western."

So Aotearoa decided to put their songs into a traditional context. Ngahiwi explains it. "When you look at Maori waiata, you see that they've either been composed to commemorate a certain event or express a feeling about certain things. We took these kaupapa and sang about them in English and people said, 'Wow this is a new'. The only difference is that we were saying the message in English."

'Whakarongo', 'He waiata powhiri' and 'Maoritanga' are all examples of this traditional waiata-a-rangi, says Ngahiwi. Only 'He waiata powhiri' has been recognised by record reviewers as being in the traditional mode, says Ngahiwi, which probably speaks volumes about the lack of musical understanding. "Many people not culturally competent have put down our music."

Aotearoa was originally, Joe Williams, Maru Goddard nee Tibble, Mark Te One, Karlite Rangihau. Then came a steady succession of singers and musicians, Dina Fuli and her sister Lucy, John Wriggley, Tai Fuimaono and Ngapera Hoerara, Charles Royal and Karl Smith.

Now Aotearoa boasts Keri Noda on keyboards, Kevin Hodges on sax and guitar, with Mark McGregor on drums and percussion, with James Ruwhiu on bass. Ngahiwi says James and Mark make a stunning rhythm section.

With the strong emphasis on giving out the message of Maori staunchness, Ngahiwi is adamant that the band's message stays political because choosing to be Maori is a political act.

"'Maoritanga' is about a person's



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