

# Entertainment seen as cultural bridge

Louis Edwards

George Tait

Music as a bridge of cultures was a firm belief put into practice by the late Maori composer George Tait, a cultural officer for the Maori Affairs Department based in Auckland. Mr Tait, an elder of Te Arawa, wrote *The Bridge*, which made recording history for singer Deane Waretini when it went platinum and became the largest selling single in New Zealand. George Tait's philosophy is revealed in this rare interview he granted shortly before his death, to a Maori journalist ....

"It is my job to revive and maintain culture. How is one going to do that? One way is to look at the state of mind of the people and start from there. There must be a commitment of people. You must stimulate them somehow — you must get to where they are. This is where entertainment comes in. I must say that today *The Bridge* has stimulated them.

"I write a song in Maori with a message and a Maori value. Then I translate it into English so it communicates with everybody. The interaction of cultures is important — one must stimulate the other.

"The basis of all cultures is the same. Culture stems from food ... nature is the only supplier of food. We all look at the same sun, but from different angles to it. The structure of cultures is different, but the basis is the same.

"Entertainment is where it is easy to share cultures, so this is why we came up with the Mauri Hikitia group, which consists of Maori corporations and different cultural groups. Last year (1980) we staged shows to raise funds for the Polynesian Festival, involving all the different cultures in Auckland.

## Misunderstandings

"Songs are one way of getting messages to people. It is most important to communicate to all people. A lot of our problems are just misunderstandings. What we are involved in is not so much race relations as cultural relations. When one understands one's own language and culture in depth, then one can appreciate others. The whole idea of *The Bridge* is that: It has an English title, then the song is in Maori with an English translation, plus an Italian tune.

"Deane's next single, *Ethos*, has a Greek title meaning 'life force', plus Maori words. The idea is to incorporate as many cultures as possible, deliberately drawing on a tune identified with another country.

## Nature sounds

"When you talk about traditional Maori music, you talk about the sounds heard at the time, the sounds of nature. Really looking at what is meant by traditional music, you find it has to be lived. You must create all the time. My ancestors created music of their time, and

today we must create music of our time. What is more traditional than the present? If we do not create we do not live our time.

"The problem is we stopped creating 100 years ago ... we are out of control of the most important thing of the Maori way of life. The two cultures must go together. We must use English in our songs — not only for the English but also for those who cannot speak Maori. I would like to point out to my people that language was created for this purpose. It is a family thing — not just my immediate family but the extended family. Everyone has a say in it. It belongs to all of us. We all have a right to have a say in it.

## My wife

"One of the most important people in all of this is my wife in that she is living in a world of 50 years ago. She has always managed to live her way of life



in spite of changing circumstances. This has influenced me to keep to the Maori way of life, and the language also. One is no good without the other."

As well as his poetry, George Tait wrote a play, *Hunga Ho*. Produced by Don Selwyn, it was performed by the Te Whanau company at the South Pacific Festival in New Guinea. Mr Tait also wrote the script for the re-enactment of the founding of his home town, Rotorua, at the city's centennial celebrations. He also composed a traditional song for Te Arawa for the occasion.

## ENTERTAINMENT PROFILE

Kevin Roberts

**"You can do it, you can do it," is the motto used in a current Television advertisement urging New Zealanders to get out and do things they always wanted to try, but never quite got around to doing. It also sums up Jim Moriarty's attitude to his work as an actor and his answer to the dearth of Polynesian performers throughout the various local entertainment fields.**

Jim is probably the most easily recognisable of all of our homegrown actors, due largely to the six years he spent as Rikki on "Close to Home". He recently left the local soap opera "as it was time to move on."

His first move was to Circa Theatre in Wellington where he played a four week extended season as "Delroy" in the play "Sus" concerning a polite interview of a coloured suspect.

He followed "Sus" with his current national tour as Che Guevara in "Evita". Not totally lost to T.V. audiences however he will be seen later in the year in Roly Hubbards' drama about a Maori land march.

## Porirua bred

Jim Moriarty was born and bred in Porirua and despite being only twenty

nine, he recalls days when that city was "a rural town, when you could cast nets into Porirua harbour and wild pig and deer occasionally ventured to the back door."

He looks back on his childhood as being "idyllic" in an area with a true community spirit. A background he says he has not lost sight of.

After schooling at St Pats College town, he trained as a psychiatric nurse at Porirua Hospital. His seven years as a nurse provided an invaluable background for an actor both "as a study of human behaviour and in learning to express your own personality."

Nursing is a humbling profession that keeps you in sight of what's important in life, like two young sons and an extended family of relatives and friends."